DEAR ACQUAINTANCE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

APRIL'S SOWING
HEATHER OF THE SOUTH
LAKE OF ENCHANTMENT
LIFE'S WHAT YOU MAKE IT
WILD, WILD HEART

DEAR ACQUAINTANCE

BY

ROSEMARY REES

CHEAPER EDITION

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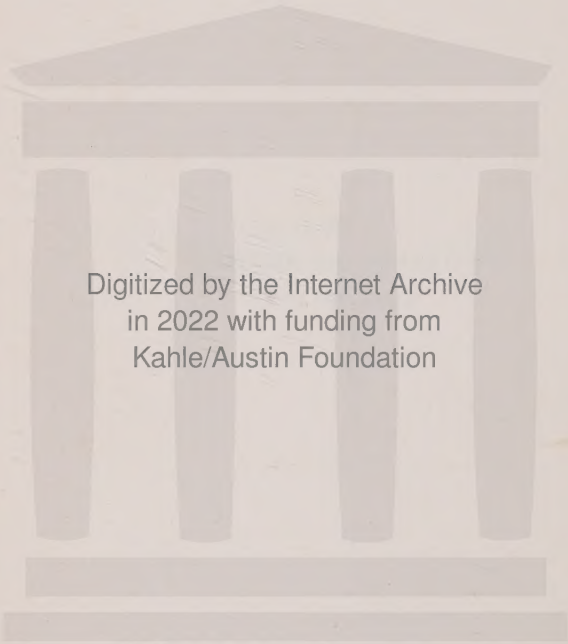
TO

PHYLLIS AND BENNIE

WITH MY LOVE



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CHAPTER I

IN No. 5 Dressing Room the air was heavy with the odour of hot cosmetique, powder, grease-paint and perfume; and the glare of the unshaded electric lights—reflected and magnified by many mirrors—was so brilliant as to be almost painful in its intensity. This fierce flood of radiance revealed with uncompromising clarity, not only the extravagantly attired figures of the two girls themselves, but every detail of the small room in which they sat: the heavily curtained window; the rows of gaily coloured stage frocks suspended by hangers from a dozen black pegs; the bright satin shoes lying awry on the carpet; the dressing-places littered with sticks of grease-paint, powder boxes, and jars of face-cream; the sofa and chairs; the wash basin with its two taps; and the innumerable telegrams pinned up on the walls, together with photographs, mascot dolls, and lucky charms.

The telegrams: " Best of luck old thing for to-night "; " Wishing you a big success "; and others of a like nature, were now already two months old. And during those two months, for six evening performances and two matinees each week, Hilary Ware and Gina Gould had sat side by side, smoothing the thick grease-paint over their unlined young faces, before the call-boy's cry of " Overture and beginners, please! " summoned them to the stage.

They were described on the programme as: ' Divorced wives of Hiram P. Blaxted the Sausage King '; and they were appearing in the cast of ' London's Latest Laugh,' the revue which was so happily and wittily entitled, ' Sausages and Mash.'

The ' Intelligent Playgoer ' might be inclined to dismiss

such a revue, and all connected with it, as banal and futile. But Hilary and Gina were neither. Young and vital, eager for experience, each held within her the vast potentialities for good or evil which lie in the souls of all men and women.

Gina had already definitely chosen her road. To her it represented the way of pleasure. She meant to have 'a good time,' to enjoy everything life offered her. Now her hands—though outstretched quite openly to take—seemed too young and soft to be described as predatory. Later, they might be claws and talons, with which to snatch and grab.

But Hilary looked out on life from the background of a healthy, honest girlhood, with clear brown eyes that sometimes held within them a hint of fear. There was a touch of wildness in her face—something which indicated temperament and feeling in the sensitive mouth and in the wistful arch of the fine brows. Almost it seemed as though she herself were doubtful of her own courage—her ability to face any of the storms or stresses of life. She didn't want to face them. She, too, wanted the easy, pleasant road—meant to have it if possible. But she knew that a certain coarseness of fibre which Gina had was lacking in her own character. One mustn't be too dainty and fastidious if one wanted to live softly. Fine feelings weren't always compatible with fine living.

To-night the girls had reached that period of the evening's entertainment known to them both as their 'long wait'; and Blanche, the dresser, had been sent out for Gina's third whisky and soda. Hilary, earlier, had declined a second one, and this had provoked something of an argument—an argument dropped for a time but now revived.

"I don't want any more. We'll be expected to drink to-night, won't we?"

"Expected to? Pretty sort of party if we weren't! That's what we're going for, isn't it?"

At this moment the door leading out into the long

stone-floored corridor was pushed open, and Nan Stirling entered. " It's only me," she said.

Gina, bending close to her mirror, adding another layer of carmine to her already heavily made-up lips, nodded in a casual, friendly fashion.

" Hullo! Thought you were Blanche with my whisky."

Nan gave a cheerful grin.

" Sorry to disappoint you."

She wore an evening-dress and wrap, and as her make-up was not nearly so heavy as that of the other two girls, it was evident that it was not stage make-up. She was merely ready for the party.

" Early, aren't you? " said Gina. " They haven't called us for our last number yet."

" I know, but I got the pip all alone in the flat—felt perfectly mouldy—so I thought I might as well dress and come on here."

" Have a drink? Blanche'll go out and get you one. That little rotter Hilary won't have anything."

" All right, I'll take her share. Don't worry." Nan flopped down on the sofa and produced three letters. " Australian mail, Hilary! Came by the last post so I brought it on." She threw the letters across to Hilary, and then turned again to Gina. " And one for you. I saw it in the rack at the stage door so I brought it up."

" Thanks." Gina took the letter and turned it over. " From France. Who's writing to me from France? " She tore open the envelope, but Hilary sat quite still with her three letters lying on the dressing-table before her. The very thick one was from mother, and Joan's was the thin one. Joan never wrote long letters. She said mother gave you all the family news. So she scribbled a few lines just about the dances she was going to—the men in the office—the rise she'd had—the tennis club. If you'd received one letter from Joan, you knew exactly what all the rest would be. And Gladys—the young monkey—still at school, scarcely ever bothered to write. A letter or

two acknowledging the small presents sent out by her sister, and three Christmas letters for the three Christmases Hilary had been in England. Three years was a long time. Gladys was only twelve when Hilary left home, Joan fifteen, and she herself just twenty. The other letter in the grey envelope was from John Harper. Faithful old John! Not really old—only a year or two her senior. Did he still potter about next door in the garage under the Moreton Bay fig tree? You could see the Harper's side verandah, all covered with purpley-blue morning glories, from Joan's bedroom window. One got a peep, too, at the brilliant sapphire harbour—lovely Sydney Harbour, and the ships and ferry boats, and the red-tiled roofs of the city across the water—through the swaying green branches of the tall, pink-blossomed oleanders.

Poor John! He hadn't approved of her idea of going on the stage. That last night, coming back along the Lane Cove Road in his old Citroën—a hot north-easter tossing the branches of the gum trees to and fro across the starry sky—she'd nearly consented to give up the idea of coming to England. What a blessing she hadn't! Why, if she'd stayed in Sydney she might have been married to John by now; living in a little suburban villa, alone all day doing her own housework, while John was at the bank in Pitt Street, adding up, adding up, from morning till night. Perhaps John would transfer his affection to Joan one day. That might be a good thing.

Hilary took up her mother's letter; but Gina was speaking:

"Here's a scream! Just listen to this. You remember that French wine merchant from Bordeaux who was potty about me?"

Hilary put her mother's letter down again. Somehow she didn't want to read it here. She had a feeling that it didn't belong. Mother would be shocked at this free and easy atmosphere. Was she, Hilary herself, sometimes just a little shocked? Indignantly she denied this. She'd

been on the stage for three years. She wasn't an ignorant schoolgirl. Surely, nowadays, even if one didn't behave quite in the same way oneself, one wasn't prudish, and self-righteous, and stupidly narrow-minded about others. Did she consider herself any better than Gina? What an odious little prig both Nan and Gina would think her if they knew the sudden shrinking of her mind from some of Gina's stories.

"Just listen!" Gina's voice was shrill with laughter. "He thinks I'll go out to Bordeaux to join him. He's booked my passage. Sent me the ticket."

"No!" said Nan. Her good-natured face was alight with interest. Everything intrigued Nan. She was never bored except with her own company. She couldn't bear to be alone. That was why Hilary had asked her to come and share the little flat in Westminster. They had been on tour together a year ago, and now Nan's husband was with a company in Africa.

"Look! Here's the ticket. Made out in my name and everything!"

"Well, I never did!" Nan scrutinised the ticket carefully. "But it says you get on at Tower Bridge. I never knew that was the way to Bordeaux."

"It's one way. He explains it here. I've only got to step on board this boat at the London and Bordeaux Trading Company's wharf any Saturday morning at twelve o'clock, and, hey presto! in three days' time—if I don't die of seasickness in the Bay of Biscay—I step off the boat again at Bordeaux and into my boy friend's arms. I'm to let him know when I'm coming. What a scream! Look at his letter. His English is comic!" She pushed the letter into Nan's hand. Nan loved reading other people's letters. Her curiosity about her fellow-creatures' affairs was apparently insatiable. But that was what made her lovable—the keen interest she took in the lives of others.

"It's available for three months, I see, but you've got to have a passport."

Gina went off into another peal of laughter. " You silly old Juggins, Nan! You don't suppose I'm going, do you? "

" No," said Nan. " But what will you do with the ticket? "

" Light a cigarette with it," replied Gina, crumpling it up.

" Don't do that. . . ." Nan snatched it out of her hands. " It cost six pounds. Look—it says so." Even Hilary had to laugh at Nan's tone. They always teased Nan about her thriftiness.

" If you'd ever been as hard up in your lives as I've been, you'd be careful too," she invariably replied. But she wasn't really thrifty. She was everlastingly buying things because they seemed to be bargains, and they might ' come in.' But they never did ' come in.' They usually went out—unused—in the dustbin. Now she bought the ticket to Bordeaux for half a crown!

Both Gina and Hilary were in fits of laughter at her. Nan laughed too, but she stuck to her guns all the same —and to the ticket. " I may be able to sell it."

" Silly ass! No one wants a ticket in a cargo steamer to Bordeaux."

" I might go for a trip myself."

" Then you'll have to travel in my name. It says it isn't transferable."

" I'll find some use for it," said Nan obstinately, as she folded it up and put it in her bag.

" And I'll find some use for your half-crown. Here's Blanche! Blanche, just step out and buy Miss Stirling a double whisky. She's having it with me, but she's paid for it herself." With a wink at Hilary, Gina handed Blanche the coin paid to her by Nan as the price of the ticket to Bordeaux.

CHAPTER II

THE party was given by a rather wealthy bachelor friend of Gina's at his flat; and it was very much the same as other parties which Hilary had attended during the past few months. A great many hot and noisy people were crowded into two not over-large rooms, a hall, and a bathroom; and the air was thick with cigar and cigarette smoke. Everyone shouted at everybody else, and no one seemed to listen. Cards were being played in the bedroom; a gramophone was going in the living-room where a few couples danced; but the buffet in the hall, and the 'bar' arranged in the bathroom, attracted most attention from the guests.

Hilary's first two years on the stage had been spent with good repertory companies in the provinces; and in those hard-working, but happy days, parties such as these were unknown to her. This, of course, was much gayer! This was seeing life! Hilary took two cocktails in quick succession from the hands of a facetious young man who was acting as barman, and then everything seemed easier and more amusing. She was even inclined to believe that the barman's constantly repeated remark about being quite ready to give anyone who desired it a hot or a cold bath, was funny. Not very witty perhaps, but funny enough to make one laugh.

Nan had never budged from the buffet. Nan's idea of a nice party was having a good hearty meal; and she always saw to it that the business of securing sufficient nourishment was attended to without any loss of time.

Hilary, tired of waiting for her, moved towards the card-room. A man standing in the doorway impeded her progress. She tiptoed to glance over his shoulder, and he turned and regarded her coolly.

"And what are *you* doing at an entertainment like this?"

Hilary looked up at him in surprise. One didn't wait for introductions at these parties, but the man's tone was so intimate—the 'you' emphasised in such a way as to suggest a complete knowledge of her identity—that she wondered quickly where and when she had made his acquaintance. He was tall, and handsome, in a somewhat sinister fashion; his dark hair was turning grey, and his heavy chin was blue with constant shaving. But he was undoubtedly a stranger to Hilary. She would never have forgotten that queer, inscrutable smile, if she had seen it before.

"Why shouldn't I be here?" she asked.

"They must have snared you in the woods."

"How rude! Like a specimen for the Zoo!"

"I've never seen a wood-nymph or a dryad at the Zoo."

"I've never seen one anywhere."

He took her head quite calmly between his two long-fingered hands, and turned it so that she faced a mirror on the wall beside her.

"You see one now," he told her; "eyes like the clear brown water of brooks, lips like red autumn berries, and a dress made from the first green of spring."

"Sounds uncomfortably like Eve," remarked Hilary, with an elaborate air of unconcern.

She was already well enough versed in the manners and customs of this Bohemian world to conceal any resentment she might feel at his familiarity, and she now continued in the same flippant strain: "At any rate I'm glad you like the colour of my lipstick."

"I'd like to know what your lips are like"—he paused for a moment—"below it."

In spite of her cocktail-given courage—in spite of a fairly comprehensive experience of the opening gambits of flirtation—flirtation of not too delicate an order—something in the man's tone left Hilary a little breathless. There was an air of certainty—of power—about him that had a disquieting effect. She felt herself tongue-tied—unable to make any adequate rejoinder. But when he spoke again her self-control returned. Perhaps he had intended that it should.

"I have a picture in my flat that might be a portrait of you. Perhaps you sat for it."

Hilary shook her head. "No, I don't know any artists—except revue artistes."

He made no comment on this. "Come along over to the card-table," he said abruptly. "They're playing chemey. If the police knew we might be raided."

"What a joke!"

"Not quite so great a joke as you seem to imagine," he returned drily. "They visited this flat once before. I'm glad to say I wasn't present on that historic occasion."

Hilary felt like a small snubbed child.

"I said that because I thought it was the right thing to say," she owned up with rather pink cheeks.

"Never mind about the right thing with me. Most people would tell you I prefer the wrong thing."

He was guiding her through the crowd towards the table. It seemed to Hilary that there was a sort of passage-way made for them; and certainly when they reached the card-players, two men jumped up to offer her companion their places. He nodded to the younger man of the two.

"Thanks, Jimmy. Just for ten minutes."

His hand was on Hilary's shoulder, and before she quite realised what was happening, she was sitting in the vacated chair, with the green baize cloth of the table before her, and the circle of the gamblers' faces on a level with her own.

The long-fingered brown hand deposited a roll of notes in front of her. Hilary glanced up at him as he stood behind her.

"I don't know how to play . . ."

He was leaning very close against her shoulder. "I'll show you," he answered. "It's quite simple. You play for me. A beginner's often lucky."

For a time Hilary took no part in the betting, but watched the other players, while the man behind her explained the rudiments of the game.

"The banker deals the cards—two to himself and two to his betting opponent. The hand whose total is nearest to nine wins. If your hand totals ten, or any multiple of ten, it's a washout. You're baccarat and you lose."

When the 'shoe' containing the cards was passed to Hilary, and it was her bank, she was told to put five pounds in the centre of the table, and to deal. She dealt: a three and a four to her opponent, and a ten and a queen to herself.

"Baccarat!" remarked the croupier, glancing at her cards casually; and with that her five pounds was swept away, and the bank passed.

It seemed a very swift and absurd method of disposing of one's money, Hilary thought; and was thankful that it wasn't her own. A silly game!

But a few minutes later when she was told by the man behind her chair to say: "Banco!"—that is, to bet against the banker—and found the two cards dealt to her were a king and a nine, she was inclined to reconsider her opinion. The five-pound note was returned to her, and now the game appeared to be less foolish.

When the 'shoe' had gone round the table, and it was her turn to take the bank again, she dealt a three and a five to herself, and the cards held against her totalled six. She had won, and kept the bank. On the next hand she won again, and again the third time.

"Now pass the bank," whispered her monitor.

She passed it, and her winnings were pushed towards her. Hilary could scarcely believe her eyes! Forty pounds! Deducting the original five pounds, it meant a clear gain of thirty-five pounds.

A splendid game!

What a pity it wasn't her own money she was playing with! She turned an excited, laughing face up over her shoulder to her instructor. He smiled down at her. She had forgotten her fear of him now; although she had no idea of what his name might be, he seemed like an old friend.

The ten minutes for which Hilary was to occupy Jimmy's chair, lengthened into half an hour. She had lost, and she had won, she had lost again, and won again. It was thrillingly exciting! Now the bank had mounted to eighty pounds.

"Say 'banco,'" whispered the man behind her chair.

"Banco!" The cards were turned face upwards. She won!

Eighty pounds! Rapidly she deducted the sum with which she had originally started, from the total. A nice little profit of sixty pounds remained.

She heard the voice of the man behind her chair remarking: "You can take your place again, Jimmy!" and knew that she must leave the table. She didn't want to. The gambling fever was in her blood. She rose, hoping that her reluctance to give up her place wasn't too apparent. The dark face of the man whose winnings she held in her hands, smiled down at her.

"So you don't want to stop?" he asked.

"It seemed a pity when I was winning."

"If you always stop when you're winning, you're a pretty safe gambler, aren't you?"

She laughed. "I suppose you are. Here's your money." She held out the bundle of notes. He took them, counted them out, and gave her back one stiff white one.

"Ten pounds! What's this for?" she asked.

"Your commission for playing."

"Oh! but I can't take your money."

"Why not? You won it. I didn't."

That was true, thought Hilary. She'd never taken money from anyone before, although both Gina and Nan had no hesitation in taking all they could get. In Nan's case this amounted to very little. "When they know you've got a perfectly good husband somewhere in the background, the men grow a bit stingy," she had been known to remark. She didn't add: "a perfectly good husband to whom you are a perfectly good wife," but she might have done. Nan's only grief was that she and her husband were so often separated.

As Hilary looked down at the money in her hand, she was thinking of Nan. Poor old Nan was out of a job. She was just scraping along on the money her husband was able to send her from South Africa, and that wasn't much. She could buy Nan a new frock. Well, perhaps not a frock—a little hat—not too expensive. Hilary herself wanted a new evening-dress! Her salary wasn't very big, and there were so many odd expenses. Tips and taxis, drinks and cigarettes, photographers and hair-dressers; to say nothing of housekeeping expenses and clothes. But of course she couldn't take the money—she hadn't been brought up to accept money from men. She handed the note back again. "No thank you," she said.

He took it from her, folded it into a very small tight square, and then before she knew what he was doing, he had slipped it down the front of her dress. For just a second his brown hand had brushed the smooth whiteness of her breast.

"It wouldn't be dignified to fish for it," he remarked coolly, "and dignity seems to be your strong suit. Queer that, in such a nymph-like creature! But perhaps your little air of dignity is a cloak to hide your shyness."

Shyness! That to Hilary was a word that signified everything gauche and unsophisticated. She was bitterly ashamed of being thought 'shy.' So now, though her cheeks were a trifle flushed, she managed to shrug in a detached and unconcerned fashion.

"I see it would be a waste of time and energy to argue with you," she remarked, "and so . . ."

Her sentence remained unfinished, for here Gina intervened. A somewhat stormy-looking Gina, whose eyes held a very steely light, and whose lips were set in a thin and rather ugly line.

"I didn't know you were a friend of Hilary's," she said, addressing herself to the man.

"Didn't you? Oh, yes, Hilary—little Saint Hilary—and I are quite good friends. We haven't known each other long, but we've already found that we've something in common."

"Really! and what's that?" Gina's voice was still sharp.

"We're both admirers of your own."

"Oh, are you?" Gina glanced a trifle suspiciously from one to the other, but she was distinctly mollified.

"I've been looking for you everywhere," the man went on. "I thought we were going to dance."

They neither of them seemed to be paying the smallest attention now to Hilary, and yet as they moved away together, the man turned and smiled at her. An intimate, low-lidded smile that seemed to be full of meaning. What meaning? That Gina was really of no importance, but that he must humour and placate her?

Hilary resented that smile, which seemed to indicate a secret shared between them in which Gina had no part. The man was an abominable creature altogether—but he was clever. He'd realised at once from Gina's use of her name—Hilary—that she and Gina were acquaintances; and he evidently knew that it was quite safe to tell a woman she was secretly admired. She'd always be inclined to believe it true.

A young man struggled through the crowded doorway towards Hilary. Would she dance? Of course she would. Would she like a whisky and soda first? Of course she would. So they adjourned to the ' bar ' and she did not see Gina or the man again that night.

CHAPTER III

LATER, going home in the taxi, Nan, who had been particularly trying for the past half-hour, remarked, apropos of nothing, that she'd better take care or Gina would be scratching her eyes out.

"What do you mean?" demanded Hilary crossly. How Nan did get on one's nerves at times!

"Well, if you'd seen her face just before she cut in on you and Feltman!"

Feltman! So it was Feltman who had called her 'little Saint Hilary'! No wonder people made way for him, and those two young men jumped up to offer him their chairs. Director of one of the richest producing syndicates in London—with his finger in a dozen theatrical pies. Gina had been bragging lately in the dressing-room of her visits to his wonderful flat. She hadn't known him for more than a week or two, but friendships ripened quickly with Gina, and Feltman himself wasn't altogether slow in his methods, Hilary reflected drily.

Conscious of some feeling that was compounded of scorn and distaste for them both, Hilary moved impatiently; and as she did so a corner of the bank-note concealed beneath her frock chafed her soft skin. Should her scorn be directed solely against the man and Gina? Was Hilary Ware in a very safe position for stone-throwing?

She wouldn't answer that question, but unreasonably she felt her anger and annoyance against Nan increasing.

Nan wanted to know about this meeting of Hilary's with Feltman. Had she just been introduced to him when Gina butted in? Apparently they hadn't been observed together at the card-table. Hilary, becoming mulish, determined not to gratify Nan's curiosity. Such rubbish she was talking! Asking silly questions, and then, when she found they weren't eliciting the information she desired, complaining of having indigestion, and feeling ill, and being generally sorry for herself.

" You can't expect to feel very well after eating all that supper," Hilary remarked rather brutally, at last.

" Well, I'd only had a scrambled egg for tea. It didn't seem worth while getting any dinner as you didn't come home after the matinee."

' My fault she had no dinner, I suppose,' thought Hilary irritably.

" And if I did eat a good deal of supper," continued Nan, giving way to a sudden flare of annoyance at Hilary's lack of communicativeness on the subject of Feltman, " at any rate I wasn't in the bar quite so often as . . . as some people. And *I* don't set up to be so very high-minded either! "

" Meaning that I do? " asked Hilary icily.

They were both tired out, and they had both had a little more to drink than was strictly necessary. The result was that when they reached their flat, paid off the taxi, and fumbled their way into the dark hall, they were scarcely on speaking terms.

Three floors of offices—deserted and ghostly now—lay below their attic flat. Hilary switched on the light and went upstairs without waiting for Nan, who seemed to be mumbling and muttering over the letter-box at the hall door. Let her mutter! Hilary, now thoroughly enraged, resolved that she would go to bed without saying another word to her companion. Yet after all she didn't keep this resolution, for it appeared that there was a letter in a brown envelope which had fallen against the brown door, and which Nan had evidently failed to see when

collecting the Australian mail for Hilary earlier in the evening. And the letter in the brown envelope was for Nan.

So upstairs in the little sitting-room the two girls both sat down to open their respective letters. They were still maintaining a somewhat sulky silence with one another; but as Hilary turned over the closely covered pages—read the simple expressions of love, from her mother—the hardness of her heart was softened, and she looked across at Nan with eyes that had grown a little less obdurate.

But, oh, heavens! What was the matter? Nan was crying! Sniffing and blowing her nose—all her poor, tired, pretty face puckered up and swollen—and the tears making the black run off her eyelashes in streaks. Moreover it was quite evident that Nan didn't care a pin if she looked the most awful sight in the world. Hilary, with her heart in her mouth, sprang up to comfort her.

"Nan! Nan! What's the matter?"

It appeared that this was a letter from Bill—her husband. He wanted to see her so much. He missed her so dreadfully. There was a vacancy in the company, and if only she could raise enough money to pay her own fare out, and bring some really nice clothes, and could come by the next boat, the management would engage her. Of course Bill didn't think there was the least hope of it, but he'd written on the chance; and if she could rake up the money somewhere, she was to send a cable, and he would be in the seventh heaven of delight.

"But where could I get the money?" wailed poor Nan. "Why, it would mean about fifty pounds at least. There isn't anyone anywhere that would lend it to me, and I haven't got anything to pawn. And, oh, how wonderful it would have been. We'd have been together and able to save quite a lot. Oh, I wish he'd never said anything about it . . . it's worse now than . . . ever. . . ." She choked over the last few words. She was desperately tired, and the quarrel with Hilary had left her desperately lonely and self-pitying. This letter from Bill was like

some cruel practical joke played upon her—like a goblet of ice-cold water displayed before a thirst-parched wanderer in the desert, and then withdrawn.

But the goblet was to be given into her hands—held to her lips. Hilary was making frantic calculations. "I could lend you just about fifty pounds," she said. It represented practically all the money she had at present in the bank; but after all 'Sausages and Mash' was bound to run for some months longer, and with the money that Feltman had . . . Her mind glanced away from that, but she felt it safe and warm in its hiding-place all the same . . . oh, she'd get along quite well.

Nan was staring at her with her mouth open. "Hilary —would you? Could you? Oh, Hilary, I'd bless you for ever if you would, and I'd pay it back *directly* I was playing. I wouldn't spend a *bean* on myself, and neither would Bill, till we'd paid it back. Oh, Hilary, you're a darling! I'll travel steerage if I have to. Oh, I won't sleep a wink to-night—I mean this morning—I know I won't!"

But she did. She tumbled into bed without even taking the make-up off her face, and she was soon snoring quite comfortably while Hilary lay wide-eyed and wakeful. Already Hilary was conscious of a certain uneasiness of mind. Why was she so wretchedly impulsive? Suppose 'Sausages and Mash' ended suddenly! Suppose she were left without a job! Suppose . . .

No, she wouldn't suppose anything so stupid. And whatever happened she wouldn't let Nan know she was anxious about the future. Whatever happened she wouldn't go back on her word to poor old Nan. Nan should go out to South Africa by the next boat.

CHAPTER IV

SURE enough, just a week later Nan sailed.

With all the shopping that had to be done; the few odd debts that had to be paid; various cables that had to be sent; and the amount of money that had to be deposited for the fare; Hilary found, after Nan's departure, that there was precious little left of her bank balance, Feltman's ten pounds, or her last week's salary. Nan's expenses had pretty well cleared her out. She ought to have been firmer with Nan; she knew it; ought to have insisted that only absolute necessities were purchased. But having made so grandly generous a gesture, she didn't want to spoil the picture—portrait of an unselfish, warm-hearted girl—by seeming mean in trifles. After all, she herself had very few debts; and 'Sausages and Mash' appeared to be quite an established success.

But was it? Ten days after Nan left the 'notice' went up. They were to finish in a fortnight's time.

The members of the company, taken entirely by surprise, were plunged into the depths of despair. Why should a show that was apparently playing to well-filled houses, end so suddenly, they asked bitterly.

It appeared that although business was good it was not quite good enough to meet the heavy expenses; and the management had resolved to cut their losses and terminate the London run.

So now, close upon thirty young women, and about half that number of young men, were to be seen each morning swelling the crowds that trailed up dusty flights of stairs

to the theatrical agents' offices; or hung about stage doors hoping to secure an interview with Mr. Smith the producer, Mr. Jones the stage manager, or Mr. Robinson the musical director. Upon them all—this rather pitiful army of the soon-to-be-unemployed—the stage door-keeper looked out from his little niche with an air of mingled boredom and contempt.

" Got an appointment? No? Well, it's not likely he'll see you without one, is it? Mr. Brown told you to call at twelve-thirty? Well, he ain't in the theatre. Must have forgot about it. Mr. Robinson left word he wasn't to be disturbed on no account whatsumever. Mr. Jones is rehearsing understudies. No, I can't take no cards to nobody."

He threw these remarks out over the crowd, as one or other member of the group advanced to him. Hilary was sometimes to be seen amongst these pathetic little reconnoitring parties; Gina, never. Loss of employment held no terrors for Gina. Money was unusually plentiful with her at present; but easier circumstances had not made Gina easier to deal with. Ever since that night when Hilary had first played ' chemey,' Gina's manner to her had changed. Feltman's name had never been mentioned between them, but Hilary knew the cause of the quite perceptible coolness on Gina's part.

' She needn't worry,' thought Hilary. ' I've no desire to see the man again.' But this, though true in a sense, was not altogether true. Not once, but many times, she had wondered whether Feltman might not help her to get an engagement. That was her main preoccupation at present—to find work. She had never before been quite so perilously near the border line of penury. On leaving Australia to come to England she had been safely provided for by a little legacy left to her by her godmother. But that had long since vanished. Easy to tell herself that Nan would send back her money—or at any rate part of it—within the next month or two. Nan hadn't reached Cape Town yet; and there was so much that was unstable

about theatrical engagements—and indeed about the theatrical artistes themselves. They were usually quite generous and kind when they had money, but so often they hadn't any, and very, very seldom were they business-like. Nan would be different, Hilary told herself. She could rely on Nan!

But before Nan reached Cape Town, Hilary read in the papers a cable announcing the death of the actor-manager whose company Nan was about to join. That meant that the company would either be sent back to England, or would be disbanded, to find other work if possible, in South Africa.

To do Hilary justice, although she knew at once that any hope of Nan speedily repaying the borrowed money was now at an end, her first thought on reading the sad little announcement, was not so much pity for herself, as sorrow for the actor's relatives, and sympathy for Nan and Bill, both of whom would be now probably out of a job. Later, she had time to realise the serious position in which she now found herself. Well, in lending Nan the money she had faced a big risk of never getting it back again. She couldn't blame anyone but herself. She must make the best of a bad business, and find another job for herself as soon as possible.

When the engagement in the revue ended, Hilary was still as far off securing work as she had been when the notice went up. Then followed some weeks of very bitter experience. It was surprising how quickly one's clothes grew shabby in this constant round of interviews with agents and managers. Hilary had to buy new things in order to present a decent appearance; and trusting to better luck at some future time, had them 'entered.' There were one or two shops near the theatre where she could run up bills. Bills must be met at some time or other, however; and as day after day passed without bringing her any nearer to the desired goal of an engagement, Hilary began to grow desperate. She was living alone in the flat and seeing very few people. The class

of friends she had made lately weren't those one wanted to see when one was hard-up. And others—the friends made in the provinces during the repertory seasons—were nearly all away on tour. Except for the acquaintances she met in agents' offices, and in managers' ante-rooms, the only conversation Hilary had in these days was with the old woman caretaker who lived in the basement below the offices. In writing home the girl gave no hint to her mother that things were not going well with her. There was no money to spare in the little old-fashioned house, set in its untidy, overgrown garden, facing the harbour. The house where her mother had lived as a girl; where she and Joan and Gladys had been born; and where her father had died. Mother was doing without a servant to pay for Gladys's school fees; and Joan contributed a little out of her salary towards the household expenses.

Hilary had been the lucky one, coming into that small sum of money which had enabled her to travel to England. She had always meant to send home something out of her salary; and yet somehow when one was working there seemed so many things one simply had to buy, and when one was ' out,' well . . .

Hilary found she was lying awake at nights now thinking of what was going to happen if she were ' out ' much longer. It was at these times that thoughts of Feltman returned to her. He had seemed interested in her that evening at the party. It couldn't have meant anything, as he had never made any effort to see her again, and yet . . .

The idea which had been slowly taking shape in her mind suddenly assumed definite proportions. She would call at Feltman's office, and boldly ask him to put her into one of his productions. Why hadn't she done this weeks ago? Something had held her back; something which she now recognised as fear. Fear of what? How could any man harm her if she didn't wish it? She wasn't an ignorant simpleton. She knew the facts of life well enough—knew from bitter experience that men are

not all the chivalrous knight-errants of fiction. But surely even with Feltman she could look after herself! To be forewarned is to be forearmed; and instinct (and hearsay) had already warned her with no uncertain voice in Dan Feltman's case. Hadn't she been rather cowardly in allowing this dimly-sensed, shadowy fear to influence her? It should do so no longer.

She called at Feltman's office the next morning at eleven o'clock, and sent in her card. She could hear him talking to someone when the door leading into his private room was opened; and before the door was closed again she heard the office boy repeat her name. She braced herself for the coming interview. It appeared, however, that any preparation on her part was unnecessary. The office boy returned with the information that Mr. Feltman couldn't see anyone without an appointment; and it wasn't much use her calling at present, as he had no engagement to offer her.

Hilary, with burning cheeks, made her way out into the street. She had been convinced that Feltman would welcome her appearance at his office, and would receive her at once. Instead of which he dismissed her as casually as he would have dismissed a pushing and objectionable chorus girl.

Where should she go now? It was a bright morning in early spring. Daffodils and tulips made vivid splashes of colour in the flower-sellers' baskets at the street corners. She had walked blindly down towards Trafalgar Square, and halted near St. Martin's, facing the Cavell Memorial. Steadfastness. That was surely the final test of courage. Had she—Hilary Ware—even enough of that quality to help her through her present streak of bad luck? She wouldn't answer that question. All she wanted to do was to get home—to find some corner where she could be alone.

Back in her little lonely flat, she sat down to review her position. What assets had she? Very few possessions that were marketable. Furniture bought on the

hire system, and not yet paid for. Nothing to be raised on that. On the contrary, within the next three weeks a further payment for it would be due. But that at least wasn't a pressing liability; neither was the rent of the flat, for the landlord saw to it that his theatrical tenants paid monthly in advance. Perhaps he was aware of the precarious nature of 'professional' employment. At any rate Hilary could put to the credit side of any ledger dealing with the present difficult situation, the fact that for a week or two at least, she had a shelter. She was not homeless, though very soon she might be penniless.

That afternoon she spent in writing to one or two friends, explaining her position, and asking for assistance. They were bitterly hard to write—those letters; and the replies she received were equally unpleasant and humiliating to read. One contained a ten-shilling note, but most of the others explained at some length the writers' inability to help her.

CHAPTER V

SOME days later Hilary paid her first visit to a pawn shop. She felt that the eyes of all the inhabitants of London were upon her, as she made her way towards the side entrance with her small parcel. She had so little that was of any value—a few trinkets and one or two articles of clothing; and what she received in exchange for them, was merely enough to keep her in food, and pay for fares and stamps, for a week.

Every evening now, she spent feverishly writing letters to managers and agents, asking for appointments—begging for work. She had even written to Gina asking for assistance, but the letter had been returned to her through the dead letter office. No one, apparently, knew Gina's address. Feltman most probably would know. Should she write to Gina, and address the letter to Feltman's office? But why not write direct to Feltman, and ask for money? Again her cheeks grew hot at the memory of her visit to his office. He'd snubbed her once. Well, he could only do it again, and it wouldn't hurt her so much if the snubbing came by post and not through the lips of an insolent office boy.

She sat down at once, wrote a little note, and marked it 'personal.' "Perhaps you don't remember that I won some money once for you at chemey. I've struck a patch of bad luck, and I'd be awfully grateful if you'd help me. If something doesn't happen soon the poor dryad will have to take to the woods again. If in St. James's Park you

happen to see a very shabby, half-starved nymph hopping about amongst the budding elm branches, don't throw a stone at it—it'll probably be me." Would he help her? By that evening's post she received a typewritten letter intimating that Mr. Feltman would see her at twelve o'clock on the following day.

Hilary's heart was beating very fast—with heavy, sickening throbs—as the office boy closed the door behind her next morning, and she stood alone in the presence of the great Dan Feltman. He was writing at the big office table as she came in, and he did not immediately look up. The thick carpet on the floor, the heavy, handsome curtains, and the massive furniture of the office, all spoke of wealth. Hilary felt what little courage she had managed to retain, oozing out of her heels and her finger-tips.

The man raised his head after a moment, and put down his pen.

"Hard up, eh?" he asked.

The girl nodded. For the moment she couldn't speak. This hard business impressario didn't bear much resemblance to the slow-smiling man who had once talked to her of the colour of her eyes . . . and her lips!

"Come and sit over here." He pulled an easy chair nearer to his own, and Hilary sank into it. She was thankful that her back was towards the light. "You don't look very poverty stricken."

"I've had to keep at least one decent frock to interview managers in."

"I thought green leaves supplied your wardrobe."

"Not enough of them out as yet."

"Enough for me. I prefer beauty unadorned." He was smiling. Suddenly Hilary wondered if she were more afraid of him smiling, than she had been before. "So you want a job?"

"I'm desperately in need of one."

He thought for a moment, and then said: "I might find you something in June."

"June! Could I live on the dole till then?" She was trying to speak lightly—trying to make a poor little joke of it—and every moment she knew she might burst into tears. That mustn't happen—it mustn't.

Feltman unlocked a drawer beside him, and pulled out some bank-notes. As he swung round, his knee touched Hilary's. She knew it was intentional, but she did not dare to move, for she knew too, that without help from him she must face starvation.

Well, after all taking money from him wasn't so very dreadful, she told herself, when a moment or two later she was out on the landing, and making her way towards the head of the stairs. One could really almost look upon it as an advance of salary. And a kiss more or less didn't matter. Nothing in that to make a fuss about!

Yet her flushed cheeks felt soiled, and her heart felt sick, at the memory of that close embrace. Wedged safely in her bag, however, was the money he had given her—the money that would stave off immediate disaster; and she had his promise also, that he would find her work in June.

During the following week Hilary heard nothing further from Feltman. She read of his doings in the papers. He was to sail for America shortly, and there was a good deal written of a big theatrical combine in which he was interested.

As the days went by, Hilary began to see some humour in the situation. She had taken him so seriously! She had magnified an incident, which to him was as common and as trivial as a handshake would be to anyone else, into an affair of importance. She laughed at herself, and was glad to laugh. It lifted some weight from her mind. She was feeling a little less anxious now. There was hope in these bright, fresh days of early May—in the jollity and good-fellowship of the well-dressed crowds in the London streets; and for the moment financial difficulties seemed to Hilary not altogether insurmountable. Nan had written to say that she and Bill had joined another company, and

might be able to repay a little—a very little—of the loan shortly. And after all in June she would be working once more. Never again would she spend her salary on foolish, or unnecessary, or trivial things. She told herself that she had learnt her lesson.

CHAPTER VI

MAY was well advanced when Hilary heard again from Feltman. It was merely a hurried note, saying that he'd been working for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four but that he hadn't forgotten her. To-night he wanted to see a new production at one of the suburban theatres, and proposed that she should dine with him first, and then accompany him to the show, and give him her opinion of it. It is always flattering to be asked to advise; and when the request comes from some one of acknowledged ability, the compliment is all the more gratifying. Somehow this little note, so cool and friendly in tone, re-established the girl's confidence in herself—her confidence to meet and handle satisfactorily any situation arising between herself and Feltman. What had she to fear? Nothing at all. And the note came at an opportune moment. The bright weather had broken. The last three days had been dull and wretched. Hilary's spirits had been steadily sinking. This invitation was like a life-buoy thrown to a drowning man. To-night Feltman would tell her of the contract he was to give her in June. So that evening, thanking her stars that one at least of her evening frocks was still fresh and attractive-looking, Hilary dressed and made ready to meet her influential friend, Dan Feltman.

Just before setting out, however, she received a letter which cast a slight gloom upon her spirits. It had reference to one of the accounts she had run up some

months before; it requested immediate payment; and threatened that if the money were not forthcoming, a summons would be issued at once. But even this—though all mention of courts and the law fell with a sinister and somewhat terrifying sound upon Hilary's ears—did not have the effect of seriously interfering with the enjoyment she found in the dinner, the luxurious limousine, and the theatre.

Feltman himself was charming. No one could have been more amusing, more interesting, or more delightful in every way. Had she imagined that little scene in the office a week or two ago? The manner of their first meeting? Hilary almost persuaded herself that she had.

After the theatre Feltman again put her into the big limousine in which they had driven out, and told his chauffeur to take them to the 'Golden Shoe.' "We can get supper there," he remarked. There was nothing in his manner to indicate anything more than a pleasant friendliness. Hilary began to wonder why she had felt any alarm in his presence. What an idiot she had been to read into her two previous meetings with him something that in truth had never existed.

The room they entered was a converted basement; and it was packed to suffocation; but as Feltman had reserved a table they were conducted to it at once. Hilary had two cocktails. Rather strong they were, but very pleasant; and then they drank champagne. There were one or two men and girls here whom Hilary knew. They greeted her much more warmly after a glance at her companion. Her stock had risen in the market now that Feltman had shown himself her friend. Hilary found it pleasant to realise this; and she was quite aware that most of the girls would give their eyes to occupy her position. Life was very wonderful after all! Very bright, very gay, and most awfully amusing! But an hour later, going home in the soft-cushioned car, the world seemed to be losing a little of its glamour. She was Cinderella and the clock was striking twelve. Feltman

had said nothing yet about the June engagement. Soon she would be back once more in her lonely little three-roomed flat under the roof, and to-morrow, unless she really had a contract for the coming month, the weary round of looking for work would begin again. Then, too, there was that threatening letter. . . . No, she wouldn't spoil to-night by thinking of it.

Yet in spite of this resolve, there was a sudden sadness in her bright face. Feltman saw it as they passed through the brilliant light of Piccadilly Circus.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

They were good friends now, and so in a burst of confidence she told him something of her loneliness, her struggle to keep up appearances, and the letter that had come earlier in the evening. He patted her hand quite kindly. "Don't you think any more about it. Look!" He pulled out his note-case, and quickly separated five ten-pound notes from the thick wad that was within it. "That will help you through."

She accepted the money with far less reluctance than she had shown in taking his first ten pounds. After all, most girls were given presents nowadays by men. It was only an old-fashioned idea that one must refuse money. And this time although he might so easily have taken her in his arms and kissed her, he did not even touch her hand. In the relief of knowing that this money would probably tide her over until her next engagement started, Hilary had not been aware of the direction in which they were travelling. Now for the first time she noticed it.

"Aren't we going a long way round?"

"No, here we are." The car stopped before a big block of flats.

"I don't live here," said Hilary, laughing.

"No, but I do." He was out of the car, and waiting for her to alight. For a moment she wondered what she should do.

"I want to show you that picture—the woodland

nymph with golden brown eyes—that might be a portrait of yourself."

She still hesitated—feeling awkward, uncertain.

"Come along. You needn't stay longer than five minutes. Dawson will drive you home."

It seemed ridiculous to refuse. What did she imagine was going to happen? Only in lurid melodramas was the simple, innocent heroine lured to the bad man's flat—to be rescued later by the gallant young hero. Well, there wasn't any hero to come to her rescue, thought Hilary. Poor old John Harper, far away in Sydney, was the only one in whose honest devotion she really believed. And he, being thirteen thousand miles away, wasn't very much use at the present moment. But in any case no knight-errant was needed. She was an able-bodied young female, and quite capable of taking care of herself.

So she got out of the car, and followed Feltman up the four marble steps into the luxurious hall. The uniformed one-armed porter, sitting in an arm-chair, rose as Feltman entered.

"We don't use the lift. My flat is here." Another six soft-carpeted shallow stairs brought them to a closed door, which Feltman opened with his latch-key, and then switched on the light within. There were beautiful pictures in the white-panelled hall; lovely coloured Persian rugs on the polished floor; masses of flowers, bronzes, and statuary.

"In here," said Feltman. He turned towards another door, and for a moment, entering this shadowy room, Hilary was conscious of a quick panic-like fear. Why had she come?

But as Feltman switched on the lights, and the room was flooded with the soft radiance, the girl's apprehension fled. It did not disappear entirely. She was still aware of a faint disquiet. She would look at the picture, and then depart. Easy to plead a headache!

Feltman showed her the picture, which was beautiful,

and really did bear some resemblance to herself; and then produced glasses, and liqueurs.

"I couldn't," said Hilary, laughing. "I've had a frightful lot to drink already to-night. I've got a headache. I must go home."

"You've got to sample this first," said Feltman. "It's something very special. I get it from a man in Bordeaux."

Bordeaux! Hilary suddenly remembered that evening in the dressing-room. Nan buying the ticket from Gina! Poor old Nan! How they'd laughed at her!

She sipped the liqueur. It was delicious, but very potent. Wisely, she took no more than a sip. How quiet it was here in this lovely room—all the noise of the London traffic shut out by double windows. The big velvet chesterfield on which she sat was heaped with cushions. They were like the soft shades of pansies and lilac.

Feltman had brought a locked despatch case, and came and sat beside her, the case resting on his knees.

"What have you got there?" asked Hilary.

"Something I want to show you." He unlocked the case, and took out a colt automatic.

"Oh, goodness! It's a revolver!"

He laughed. "Yes, that isn't what I mean. Put it over there, will you?" He passed it to her, and Hilary fingered it gingerly as she placed it safely on the table.

"It isn't loaded, of course?"

He laughed again. "I believe it is."

"How dangerous!"

"Why? No one opens this case except myself."

He had a sheaf of unmounted prints now in his hand, and he laid the case aside. "These are what I want you to see." He held out a picture, and Hilary looked at it. For a moment, feeling hot and uncomfortable she wondered what she should say. It was probably the reproduction of a work of art, but for what reason was the man showing it to her? What comment could she

make that wouldn't sound prudish and ridiculous? She gazed at it in silence. Another picture took its place, and she shut her eyes, sick with a sudden sense of shame. Like a great wave the realisation of her folly overwhelmed her. What chance had she of escape? His arms were round her.

Hilary neither struggled nor screamed. A dreadful horror seemed to have robbed her of the power of action. She was like a trapped bird. A nymph in the hot and close embrace of some dreadful satyr.

Across the silence of the room cut the quick ring of the telephone bell—sharp and insistent.

"Damn," said Feltman.

"Better answer it—or take off the receiver."

Was it her own voice speaking so evenly, while her heart was pounding with fear? Panic possessing her?

"Yes," said Feltman. Her quiet tone deceived him. He believed her acquiescent. He released her. "I'd forgotten. I was expecting a business call from Manchester. It's important. I won't be a moment."

A moment! A moment's reprieve! How to escape? The revolver? No, in a flash she saw the obvious, simple way. His back was turned as he moved across to the telephone, and he never even saw her go. As silently, as swiftly, as if she were indeed a spirit of the woods, Hilary glided to the door. Noiselessly it opened. She could hear his voice still at the telephone as she reached the outer entrance. Don't dare to close that heavy door! No noise! But quickly, quickly, pass out into the darkness of the night. First through the lighted hall-way.

The one-armed porter rose. "Taxi, Miss?"

She shook her head. "No! No!" Only a whisper that! Could he hear? An agony of fear possessed her. She brushed past someone as she gained the street—a man in evening-dress. Now she was clear of the flats! Running—running along the silent streets—turning, doubling, turning again, until at last, breathless she hailed

a passing taxi. "To Charing Cross." She was in it. For the moment she was safe!

Yet even when she reached Charing Cross, and paid off the driver, she was still trembling. She dared not return to her own flat, for fear that he would follow her. It wasn't very likely that he would do that—she was of far too little importance for pursuit—and yet there was a chance that he might. He knew the address.

So, for a long time she sat huddled up in a corner of the waiting-room, and then at last, when she thought she might venture home in safety, she went out into the station yard where a sleepy porter found a taxi for her.

As they drew near the big double doors of the offices below her flat, Hilary glanced up and down the street in terror. No one lurked in the shadows. All was clear. The dawn was breaking, and a bleak little wind stirred newspaper and straw along the pavement.

Even behind those big locked doors Hilary was not altogether free from fear.

But no one pounced out on her from the great empty rooms of the offices, as she switched on the lights, and moved up the wide staircase.

And now at last, safe from pursuit, with the outer door of her own flat locked and bolted, the tension of her nerves relaxed. Safe! Yes, but for how long? What of the future? She did not imagine that Feltman was so infatuated that he would dog her footsteps constantly, but she was afraid of him nevertheless; and she knew now the only terms upon which he would be likely to give her work. How could she match her strength against his? He was so certain and so sure. If he were sufficiently interested in her, he'd find some means of gaining an ascendency over her—dominating her. Some way, too, of punishing her for eluding him to-night.

She shuddered, and her eyes travelled a trifle wildly round the four walls of the small room as though seeking some outlet—some means of escape. Escape! Yes, that

was it. Escape! To disappear just for a week or two. In a fortnight he was sailing for New York. Long before he returned he would have forgotten her. But where could she go? Somewhere abroad—that would be best. Paris? No! Bordeaux.

The name jumped into her mind like a released spring flying back into position. Bordeaux! No one would look for her there! That was the place to go to! Where was that old ticket Nan had bought for half a crown? Even in her wretchedness Hilary found herself forced to smile at the thought of one of Nan's bargains 'coming in' at last. Was it possible to make use of it? It was in Gina's name, but that wouldn't matter—no one would be likely to know she wasn't Gina. At the thought of Gina a blurred memory stirred. Feltman's voice on the telephone. It couldn't have been Manchester he spoke to. She'd heard him say 'Gina!' as though surprised and angry. Gina ringing him up! What for? What did it matter? Gina's telephone call had been her own salvation. If it hadn't been for Gina . . .

Hilary shuddered. She wouldn't think of it. All she must think of now was flight. What was to-day? Friday—no, Saturday—the dawn of Saturday—and it was on Saturday at twelve o'clock that the Bordeaux boat sailed from Tower Bridge. Where was that ticket? Feverishly, Hilary began to search. She'd seen it only the other day. Where? In an old box of rubbish—bargains from sales and other oddments—which Nan had left her as a legacy? There was the box on the lower shelf of the side table. Suppose she'd torn the ticket up, and thrown it away with a lot of Nan's old letters! She wasn't sure that she hadn't done that. Hilary knew a moment that was almost anguish, as she began her frantic search. It did not occur to her that with Feltman's fifty pounds in her possession she might book a passage in her own name. Everything seemed to depend on the finding of that ticket.

Well, it was easily found. It was lying at the bottom

of the box under scraps of material, a broken pocket comb, odd gloves, hat ornaments, and laddered stockings. Lying there, quietly waiting for its destined moment. The moment when Hilary would find it, and use it for a journey of which she little knew the end. How much of our lives lie in our own hands? Was it decreed at the beginning of time that Hilary should find that ticket? How much is blind chance? How much is already fixed by Fate, and certain?

Hilary found the ticket.

CHAPTER VII

IT was very steep climbing down the gangway from the wharf to the deck, but the steward carried all the baggage, and Hilary had her hands free to hold to the rope at either side.

"Yours is number one cabin, Miss," said the steward. "No other ladies travelling. And we don't carry no stewardess."

She followed him along the deck into the alley-way, and turned into the first door on the right. A big cabin with two berths and two portholes; a polished metal washbasin; a wardrobe; a settee and a camp-stool. Good carpet under her feet, and electric light over her head —everything looking clean and well-kept.

Why, it was more roomy here, in this little two thousand ton steamer, than in the big liner in which she'd travelled from Australia! And certainly it was more select! There she had six hundred fellow-passengers. Now, the steward told her there were only five all told. Twelve was the maximum number they could carry.

"I'll take your ticket now, Miss, if you've got it handy."

Hilary passed over the ticket. She had arranged everything that morning by telephone with the Shipping Company. She spoke as Gina Gould, and they addressed her as 'Miss Gould.' Had she a passport? Yes. She had not mentioned the fact that the passport, issued in Sydney three years previously, was in the name of Hilary

Ware—not Gina Gould. But now, as the steward asked for her ticket, a sudden panic seized her. She might be required to show her passport too! As long as the ticket and the passport were never examined together, or by the same individual, all would be well. She was not afraid of the landing in France. From the office she had learnt that no visa was necessary for her passport. "They scarcely ever open them at Bordeaux. They just look at the outside."

But would the steward ask now to see her passport?

No, he took her ticket, and without making any further demands, departed.

Well, here was her home for the next three days. She would not feel the lack of a stewardess, for the steward seemed capable and obliging, and the small saloon opposite her cabin, a little farther down the alleyway, looked quite bright and comfortable. There was a large mirror set over the sideboard; a row of portholes looking out over the forrard deck hatches; little prim pots of stiff palms on the long centre table; and hot water radiators against the bulkheads behind the line of swinging chairs.

Hilary had unpacked her two suitcases, and put everything in order in her cabin, when the steward once more knocked at her door. He had come to tell her that the sailing was postponed till two-thirty. If she wanted lunch she had better get some ashore, as there would be none served on board. Evidently all the passengers except herself had been notified of the change of time, for none of them had yet arrived.

The delay filled Hilary again with terror. What if Feltman discovered her here—travelling under another name? It was an utterly unlikely contingency, and yet it troubled her. In her bag she carried Feltman's fifty pounds. He might have her arrested as a thief!

She did not dare to leave the ship. Something might happen to prevent her getting back on board. So she locked her door, lay down in her cabin, and tired out

with her sleepless night and the emotional crisis through which she had passed, she fell asleep.

Two hours later she was awakened by voices calling from the wharf; the ringing of the engine-room bell; and the throb of the engines.

The ship was moving, and the voyage begun.

BOOK II

BIARRITZ

CHAPTER I

ROGER BIRKETT, from the boat deck, looked up the river to the big span of Tower Bridge, looming dark and sombre, against a dull grey sky. Here, and on the more distant London Bridge, the tops of vans and buses appeared like children's clock-work toys, or the mechanism of some stage set, jerked rapidly backwards and forwards by unseen hands. But the stream of traffic was no longer running strongly. At midday, streets and bridges had been thick with homeward-going workers on foot and awheel: now the City was dropping into its week-end slumber.

To the right of the London and Bordeaux Trading Company's wharf one could glimpse a corner of the Tower, and beyond this, and above the roofs of the sheds and warehouses, rose the Dome of St. Paul's.

Beneath the wharf, dark water laved moss-grown, barnacled piles, and shored-up embankment; but on the south side, barges and smaller boats were stranded on the barely covered mud-banks, which stretched before deserted quays, and tall, dingy-windowed factories.

As the engines started, and the gap between quayside and steamer widened, Roger was conscious of a certain satisfaction: there was no one to say good-bye to him. Thank heaven, he was spared the effort of shouting inane last messages to those on shore. Much as he loved his two sisters, he was relieved to think that they were safely at home in Liverpool, and not amongst the little cluster of

people who stood on the wharf, surrounded by casks, coiled ropes, and cranes, to watch the departure of the vessel. There were porters and wharf labourers idly gazing; a woman waving to the white-coated steward; a man calling farewell wishes for good luck; but as the steamer gathered speed, the group of figures on the wharf dispersed, leaving it silent and empty under the lowering sky.

It was queer to slip away like this—smoothly and almost silently—on a leaden tide, under a leaden canopy of cloud, between deserted wharves backed by desolate embankments or high rows of empty-windowed buildings. Not even a gull cried! It might have been a city of the dead through which they passed, instead of the busiest water highway of the world.

Although, like the Saturday afternoon street traffic, the river traffic too had slackened, it had not ceased altogether. In the lower reaches of the Thames, tugs, launches, and ocean-going steamers passed on their homeward or outward way. Sailing hay barges, like floating stacks, empty barges navigated by one man with a pair of enormous sweeps, motor barges with bricks or timber, all moved upon the stream. A forest of masts and funnels—red, blue, black, and grey—showed seemingly inland. Here were the docks, with ships from all the storms of all the world, at rest within them.

Roger, still up on the boat deck below the bridge, surveyed the pageant—a pageant not gaily coloured under so dull a sky, but with a beauty of its own. The Dome of Greenwich Observatory embowered in trees; the Naval College—men in flannels playing tennis on the courts before the massive pile of buildings; by Gallions Reach the old square-portholed sailing ships—black paint and white paint and tall tapering spars—vessels of a bygone day, now used as training ships for the Merchant Navy of King George; all this he saw, as the steamer made its way onward.

After passing Gravesend, Roger began to think of tea.

He'd go down to the saloon and make inquiries. He wondered where the other passengers had got to. At the office on the previous day he had been told that his fellow-travellers were three Frenchmen. No women aboard, thank heaven!

He made his way towards the companion leading down to the main deck, and as he did so came face to face with another voyager. Damn! So there *was* a female on board after all! She had been hidden from his view by the starboard boat, but she turned at the sound of his footstep, and for a moment they stood quite still, facing one another. Roger saw a slender girl of medium height, whose golden-brown eyes as they met his own, gave him the quick impression of some lovely woodland creature, trapped or wounded. Ridiculous and fantastic idea that! Just a pretty girl—that's all she was—with rather wistful eyes. It was the pathetic little arch of the brows that gave her that startled look. But botheration take the woman! Why should she elect to travel to Bordeaux by this particular steamer?

Roger passed on hurriedly. Half the glamour of the voyage was gone now. At any rate he needn't speak to her. She was the wife of one of the Frenchmen most likely, and probably didn't know a word of English.

But she wasn't the wife of one of the Frenchmen. She wasn't the wife of anyone. She was a Miss Gina Gould, he found out later from the steward; and she sat at dinner on the right of the Captain at the head of the table, and two of the Frenchmen sat beside her. Another occupied a chair at the Captain's left beside the Chief Engineer, and then came Roger; but as neither the Captain nor the 'Chief' put in an appearance at dinner this first evening, the five passengers, and the attendant steward, had the saloon to themselves.

It was a somewhat silent meal. The Frenchmen exchanged a few remarks; the steward murmured confidentially into Hilary's ear, and she gave her orders; and Roger asked for a whisky and soda. From across the

width of the table he was able to study the one woman passenger. He had already dismissed the other diners as elderly and unattractive. Certainly neither of these epithets could be applied to her!

Towards the end of dinner the bearded Frenchman on her right endeavoured to draw her into conversation, but she shook her head, smiling: "Je ne parle pas français."

A pretty smile! Well, if there *must* be a woman on board Roger was not sorry that the woman happened to be young and pretty. He passed her the sugar for her coffee. She smiled again and thanked him. This time Roger was rather glad that the smile was not for the bearded Frenchman. Now, it appeared that all three Frenchmen could speak a certain amount of English—they had been encouraged by that smile—and they were endeavouring to make themselves understood, claiming the one woman's attention, when Roger left the table.

He did not see her again until late in the evening. He had been invited into the Captain's room, and there, talking and smoking, and listening to the wireless, he forgot her. But when the Captain went again up to the bridge, Roger moved out alone on deck. The night was perfectly still and clear, and the ship was very quiet. The Channel might have been a lake. There was the loom of the land to starboard—the clustered lights of Margate, Ramsgate, and then the light from the North Foreland coming over the level water in one long beam of radiance until it met the ship.

The boat deck was deserted. Roger moved across to the port side, and gazed out over the dim smooth sea. The throb of the engines was only like the beating of a heart—rhythmic but muffled. In the soft darkness one still could see the outlines of the tarpaulin-covered boats in the curved white davits; the ventilators, awning stanchions, and the black funnel high against the stars. Roger had his back to the bridge, leaning on his elbow against the rail, looking aft. The sound of the wash against the ship's sides had an hypnotic effect. Perhaps it was the queer impression

he had received earlier in the afternoon—the quiet river, and deserted warehouses suggesting a city of the dead—that returned to him now, and brought to his mind the sudden memory of a play seen years ago in London—'Outward Bound.' Was this night real? Was he himself a living, breathing, human being, or like the characters of that play, had he passed over, and not yet realised that earthly life was done? He roused himself sharply. What rubbish he was thinking! He didn't usually allow his imagination to run away with him like this. He'd take a walk before turning in.

But as he moved along aft, he stumbled against the corner of a chair set in the shadow. He'd thought that no one was on deck beside himself. He'd been mistaken. The woman passenger was here—alone.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. "I never saw you sitting there. Hope I didn't wake you up."

"Oh, no! I wasn't asleep." She was rolled up in a rug, but her shingled head was bare—thrown back against the cushion.

"Lovely night, isn't it?"

"Yes, lovely."

"I'm rather glad to find a fellow-passenger to speak to. Over there by the rail I almost began to think . . ." He broke off with a laugh.

"What?"

"That I was in a trance or . . ."

"It's just like 'Outward Bound.'"

"Good God!" said Roger, thoroughly shaken at the odd coincidence—his thoughts so strangely voiced: "That's just what I was thinking!"

She turned her head sideways to look up at him. "You mean the play?"

"Yes."

"What made you think of it?" she asked.

"What made you?" Roger sat down on the corner of a deck seat beside her.

"It's so quiet and still—one can't even be sure we're

moving—like a dream. Ever since last night I've felt . . ." she stopped abruptly.

"Did you see the play when it was produced in London?"

"No, I . . . I played in it—the girl's part—about a year ago on tour."

"An actress?"

"Yes." She paused a minute. Then she gave a little uncertain laugh. "Now you know all about me."

"Well, I won't go so far as to admit that; but I did know your name, and now I know your profession."

"My name?"

"Miss Gould—the steward gave me that information."

"Oh . . ." Hilary stopped uncertainly.

"My name's Birkett—Roger Birkett. I'm an artist—of sorts. Probably it'd be more correct to say I hope to be an artist some day. My father and mother are dead. My age is twenty-four. And I'm living for the present with two unmarried sisters in Liverpool. Now *you* know all about me."

"I shouldn't like to think there wasn't any more," said Hilary; "but it's enough to go on with."

"Well, what else shall I tell you?"

"Why are you going to Bordeaux?"

"I'm starting on a sketching tour—through some of the Basque villages in the Pyrenees."

"The Pyrenees aren't near Bordeaux, are they?"

"I go on to Bayonne by train, and from there probably over the frontier into Spain. Why are *you* bound for Bordeaux? Since we seem to be playing at impertinent questions?"

"I?"

"You're not obliged to answer, you know. There's no rule in the game that compels you to be candid."

"I'm merely going for a . . . for a short holiday."

"Ever been in France before?"

"No, never."

"You don't speak French."

" How do you know? "

" You said so at dinner. But you said it in French."

Hilary laughed. " My French is only very elementary school French. Have you seen the pen of my aunt. No, but I have found the cat of the gardener."

" The gardener's cat won't help you much."

" No, but when a friend of mine was in Paris last year she got along all right. She said everyone she met seemed to speak English as well as she did."

" Perhaps they won't in Bordeaux."

" Then I'll be reduced to making signs."

" What's the sign for, ' You've charged me too much on the bill '? "

" Oh, you tear it up and stamp on the pieces."

They both laughed, and the Captain, who had come down from the bridge, halted beside them for a moment before going on to his room.

" You should have come back to hear the end of the concert, Birkett. It was fine. Good sailor, Miss Gould? "

" Splendid in this sort of weather," returned Hilary.

" Glass has gone up. Looks as if we'll be lucky in the Bay."

" Why is it so quiet? " asked Hilary. " The ship doesn't seem to be moving."

" Oh, she's moving all right. We're doing over twelve knots. We're oil-burning, you know. That's why you don't hear any noise from the engine-room. All that coal shovelling and stoking is done away with here."

He passed on to his room, and Roger remarked: " A friend in Liverpool gave me a letter to him. They were together in one of the ' mystery ' ships during the war. I've been listening to the news on his wireless."

" Was there anything exciting? "

" Mostly cricket scores. Oh, and the usual week-end suicide or murder. Some man—forget his name—discovered dead in a West End flat."

A West End flat! That phrase brought memories to Hilary. Was it only last night that she had escaped in terror from Feltman's flat? She shivered suddenly.

"I don't intend to think of London for the next few weeks," she said. "I shan't even look at the *Daily Mail* in France. I'm going to forget that such a place as England exists."

"What about your people?"

"They're in Australia." She rose and gathered up her rug and cushion.

"Let me carry those for you?"

Hilary gave them to him and then turned suddenly and impulsively. "Thank you for talking to me so . . . in such a friendly way," she said. "I was feeling awfully lonely and . . . unhappy." There was a little pause before Roger spoke.

"And you don't feel so unhappy now?"

"No."

"I'm glad."

"You see," Hilary spoke stumblingly, "I was very—very worried before I left London; and when you came up to me I was wishing we *were* 'Outward Bound'—really, you know. And then your voice—something about you reminded me of a friend—an old friend—someone I've known all my life. John Harper—he's in Sydney. John's one of those people you're always certain of—people you can trust."

"And I remind you of him. Thank you."

"I can be natural with you. I needn't be pretending all the time."

They were moving towards the companion and as they reached it Hilary stopped again. "My name isn't 'Gould,'" she said in a low voice; "it's Hilary Ware. But I don't want anyone else on board to know that. Oh, not for any dreadful reason, but the ticket was made out in Gina's name—Gina Gould—she was a . . . a girl I knew." She descended the companion, and then at the bottom she took her rug and cushion from Roger's hands

and said good night. Roger, watching her pass into her cabin, wondered for a moment whether he were quite sure that he *did* know all about her. A girl travelling alone—under an assumed name—an actress! Then he remembered her broken sentences—her shaken voice—and thought of that first impression he had received as of some wild, trapped creature—the straight, clear look of her brown eyes as she said good night. No, whatever else she might be, she was honest. He told himself that he felt for her as she seemed to feel for John Harper—he had faith. The fleeting moment of suspicion passed. And now, as Roger made his way to his own cabin, he was not so sure that a woman on board this ship would necessarily spoil the voyage for him.

CHAPTER II

THE Captain's prophecy proved correct. The fine weather held, and the dreaded Bay of Biscay was as calm as the proverbial mill-pond. Except for the wash from the ship's bows, not a white fleck appeared upon the level blue plain of the sea. And from a cloudless azure sky shone the sun. None of the passengers had the least excuse for feeling ill; and as ship-board friendships ripen with extraordinary quickness, on the second day out Hilary and Roger felt as though they had known each other for years. But friendliness was not limited to Roger and Hilary alone. In the saloon at meal times they were all quite a happy family party. Roger had even played quoits with the Frenchmen. They weren't half such bad sorts, after all. He didn't spend a great deal of his time with them, however, nor did he spend it alone. He was never absent for long from Hilary's side. What she had said that evening in the Channel was as true of himself as it was of her. He, also, didn't feel he had to pretend with her. They could be quite natural with one another. At the end of the first day their friendship was established. They were pals!

Most of this second morning they spent on the after-hatch, sitting in the shade of a boat there, amongst great coils of tarry rope. Talking to one of the engineers, busy at the winches; occasionally moving to the rail to watch a distant steamer, or to get a nearer view of the French fishing-boats—green hulled or blue, with orange sails, vivid against the brilliant sapphire sea. They passed so close

to some of these that the fishermen hailed them gaily, but Hilary couldn't understand what they were saying. Since lunch an awning had been rigged outside the Captain's room, and they had been up there under its shade, stretched out in deck-chairs. From where Hilary sat she could look below to the main deck with its upward sweep to the bow. Save for a boy sitting down there painting the rail, and the officer and seaman on the bridge above their heads, Hilary and Roger were alone. The crew's quarters were aft, not in the fo'c's'le head. The Captain was probably dozing in his room, the other passengers enjoying a quiet snooze in their cabins below. Some of the battens of the foreward hatches were open, so that the sunlight, filtering down, shone on the scarlet-painted iron sides of the hold, in vivid splashes. The two winches, covered with black tarpaulin, looked like a pair of hippopotami between the hatches. Derricks lifted orange-yellow arms, and the mast—yellow also to the cross-tops —tapered black to the cloudless sky. Beyond the deck-rail was the blue sea, slapped by a fresh land breeze against the port bow.

" Did you ever see ' Anna Christie '? " asked Hilary suddenly.

" O'Neil's play? "

" Yes."

" I've read it."

" Doesn't Anna say something about the sea changing her—making her a different woman? I feel like that."

" You're not drawing any comparison between yourself and a girl of her description, are you? " Roger spoke lightly, but when he saw the trouble in Hilary's eyes he was sorry for his own flippancy. " Did you imagine that you needed regeneration? " he asked more soberly.

Hilary nodded. " Anna wasn't bad," she said. " She was unfortunate, that was all. No, I'm not bad in that sense. But looking back on my last year, I think I've been perhaps worse than Anna. Doing shabby things. Wanting a good time, and sacrificing my own self-respect to

get it. And I haven't any of the excuses that Anna had. I wasn't so frightfully lonely—only at times—and I wasn't desperately poor—at least, not until . . ." she stopped.

"Well?"

"No. That's enough. I'm not going to talk any more about myself. But it's true what I said. The sea's made me different—that's all."

"I haven't seen any extraordinary change taking place in the last forty hours," he said.

"Forty hours? Is that all we've been on this ship?"

"About forty-eight, I suppose. But it's about forty since we met."

"Isn't that amazing? And I feel as though I'd known you for years and years."

"That's because you've got me mixed up with John—John What's-his-name."

"John Harper," she said softly. "Poor old John!"

"I wouldn't give much for Mr. Harper's chances," he commented drily.

"What do you mean?"

"It's a bad look-out for a chap when any woman says 'poor old John' in that tone of voice. Poor old John won't even pay money for a place, I'm afraid."

"Why should you imagine John is interested in me—specially? He'll marry some nice girl in Sydney."

"Oh, I've no doubt he will. I'm not suggesting that John will fade away, and die of a broken heart because you've turned him down. Hearts have grown tougher in the last twenty-five years."

"You seem to take a good deal for granted. What makes you think I've turned him down?"

"Well, didn't you?"

Hilary ignored the question. "He taught me to drive his car," she said, apparently apropos of nothing. She was back, in memory, now in the old home. Lying back in a deck-chair on the shady verandah; looking across the tangled garden with its stiff aloes and scarlet hibiscus, its overgrown tennis lawn, and the broken grey palings

outlined against the blue of the harbour. The blue was changing to opal; lights on Northshore and on the ferry-boats twinkling out in the dusk, and she was wrangling in a friendly fashion with John as to whether they should go to the ' Pictures,' or out for a drive in his car, that evening. John always voted for the car, and she preferred the ' Pictures.'

Roger interrupted her reverie. " Well, we won't talk any more about John. Better a live dog than a dead lion. John's in Australia, far away, and I'm here."

" Want to talk about yourself, do you? "

" Not particularly. I prefer the conversation to touch topics a little nearer than the Antipodes—that's all."

Hilary smiled at him. " Very well. I'll talk about anything you please."

" There's one thing I always meant to ask you. Did you play the girl's part in ' Outward Bound ' at Moreland Bay about fifteen months ago? "

Hilary nodded. " Yes, I did a five weeks' stock season there."

" Then my sisters saw you. They liked you."

" Did they? " Hilary sat up, eager for flattery! Here was a topic infinitely more interesting than ' poor old John.' " What did they say? "

" Oh, just that they liked you."

" Is that all? " pouted Hilary, sinking back into her chair once more.

" Well, it's better than saying that they hated you, isn't it? "

" I don't know that it is. Hate implies some definite feeling. Like sounds so lukewarm, somehow."

He was laughing at her now, and Hilary was forced to laugh at herself.

" Perhaps it wasn't you they liked after all. Perhaps it was someone else. Did you play the young wife . . . or rather the . . ."

" Yes, I played that one," said Hilary. " The girl who tried to commit suicide with her lover."

" With her ' dear acquaintance '? "

" Her what? "

" Haven't you read ' Precious Bane '? "

She shook her head.

" Oh, I'm shocked at you. After Mr. Baldwin has taken the trouble to tell you it's so good, and all. I'll have to lend it to you."

" Thanks. But what do you mean by a ' dear acquaintance '? "

" It isn't what I mean. It's what the book means. After all, it's a much prettier phrase than ' your young man.' Have you got one? "

" What? "

" A young man, or—or a dear acquaintance? Are you walking out with anyone? "

She shook her head again, smiling at him rather mischievously. " Not at present."

" Oh! not at present. Does that mean there's been one in the past? "

" No." Her smile faded. " When I said the sea had made me different, I meant I—oh, I don't quite know how to put it—but I feel as though I never wanted to . . . to flirt or to be made love to again. I'd like friendship—something honest and decent."

" But, my dear girl, surely love can be decent and honest too? "

" Not . . . always," she said. " Not the sort I've seen." Then suddenly her voice changed. " Don't let's talk about it."

" We won't. We'll talk about Bordeaux. Where are you going to stay there? "

But it appeared she didn't know where she was going to stay, and so Roger got out the list of hotels and recommended one to her.

" The cheapest," she said. " I want to live very cheaply, and then go back to London."

All she had was Feltman's fifty pounds. Easy to talk about the sea having changed her while she still kept

money given to her by a man who had expected something in return for that money. She ought to send it back to him, or tear it up, or burn it, or throw it into the sea. Certainly not make use of it for her own pleasure. But how was she to live if she didn't use it? After all, she'd only taken it as a loan. She could pay it back some day. No good thinking about it now.

So she resolutely refused to acknowledge herself under any obligation to Feltman. She justified her own conduct; argued that necessity knows no law; and salving her own conscience with every possible excuse, she buried all unpleasant misgivings as deep in her subconscious mind as possible. Dimly she knew that very soon she would feel no compunction about the money. Soon she would believe that she had every right to keep it—in order to keep herself. At any rate, she wasn't going to allow herself to think about it any more this afternoon.

Eight bells sounded. She jumped up. "Tea time!" she said.

Roger followed her down to the saloon.

CHAPTER III

NEXT morning they were in the Gironde. A glorious morning! All the grey skies seemed to have been left behind in poor old England.

For over three hours they moved up this lovely river. On both sides lay the vineyards, and clumps of big trees here and there on the undulating meadow-land sheltered the comfortable chateaux of the wine-growers. Landing-stages stretched out from tree-shaded paths—all flecked with sunshine and shadow—to the water beyond the reeds and sedges of the banks. There were little inlets with barges moored at embowered wharves—almost in the gardens they seemed to be! Chestnut trees in blossom—pink and white. On the river were orange-sailed barges, laden with hay or empty wine barrels. And one three-masted blue schooner—her paintwork softened by sun and weather to a lovely pastel shade—with lilac-grey sails, was a thing of beauty against the lush green banks, where cattle—black and white and buff—were quietly grazing.

Roger had spent his morning teasing Hilary about her excitement.

"I don't care if I *am* a child," she retorted. "It's all new to me. I can't help feeling thrilled. It's the first time I've ever been to a foreign country."

"What do you mean? You came from one—Australia."

She withered him with a look. "Australia foreign! Isn't it as much a part of Britain as Middlesex? But,

poor thing, of course you wouldn't know. You're an alien—born in Wales, weren't you? "

They spent a great deal of their time in chaffing one another. After all, they were neither of them far removed from the boy and girl stage.

" But weren't there any ports of call for you coming across? "

" Capetown. That was exciting too, but after all, it was only Australia over again, with slight alterations. This is quite, *quite* different."

They had reached the docks in the centre of the town, and were moored alongside the wharf. As soon as the gangway was down swarms of French dock labourers came aboard; some in blue jean and most of them wearing berets. They shouted, and talked, and laughed; and shook hands with great ceremony and politeness with the deck hands, whom they greeted as old friends.

On shore, carts and vans rattled over the cobblestones; the ponderous white, flemish-looking horses in the vans wearing heavy red collars on their big necks. Marvellous, Hilary thought, to step on to the gangway at Tower Bridge, and now to step off it again into a new world. No magic carpet could have transported them more quietly and steadily, than this small vessel.

There was a Bureau de Change opposite the wharf.

" Got any French money? " asked Roger.

Hilary shook her head.

" Better change it there, then." He piloted her across the quay, and waited for her at the entrance to the bank. It was the hour of déjeuner, and inside the big cool building Hilary was the only customer. All the French clerks were most polite, and eager to help her. Directly they realised she was English, one of them who spoke the language came to her assistance.

" Quite easy, you see," she remarked triumphantly to Roger in the doorway, flourishing her bundle of paper money at him. " I had a lovely time. They were all delighted to help me. Oh, I adore France! "

Roger laughed at her. He'd never had a younger sister. Hilary supplied a want of which he had not been aware until this moment. But was it as a younger sister he wanted her? Perhaps not exactly a sister. Say a cousin. At any rate, they seemed to have established a very jolly relationship whatever it was.

Hilary had changed the whole fifty pounds which Feltman had given her. Once it was gone—turned into thousand franc notes—she felt that it was different; not only materially, but in its very essence. It had now no longer any connection with Feltman. It had been made over into something entirely new. Something which was indefeasibly her own property. She need not think of Feltman again—ever. So she dismissed all thought of him—dismissed all thought of the past. She was here in a new world; starting a new life, with a new friend ready to serve her. A good-looking, delightful young friend too. Oh, life was wonderful! How happy she was! Let the future take care of itself. She was content to live intensely in the present moment, and forget all else. So she danced along beside Roger to the douane. Had she anything to declare? Nothing. Had she a passport? She had. The cover of the passport seemed quite enough for the Customs officials; and now she was free to enter the rattling taxi, and drive with Roger over the hot sunshiny cobbled streets to the hotel.

Roger seemed to have taken entire charge of the expedition. It was he who had selected the little hotel at which she was to stay; and when the taxi drew up in a small, quiet thoroughfare, Roger descended to inquire for rooms. Or rather, as it transpired later, a room for Hilary alone. He himself was staying elsewhere.

Hilary was mildly amused at this. Roger was being 'proper.' Not quite correct to arrive in a strange town with a young woman, and stay at the same hotel. Hilary, after her stage experience, thought this a trifle unnecessary and early Victorian, but all the same it was nice of Roger, unless he himself wanted to be free! That

was perhaps another explanation of the matter. But Hilary had a pretty shrewd idea that it wasn't the right one; for though Roger was not putting up at the same hotel as she was, he apparently had no intention of being separated from her.

"Shall I call for you in about twenty minutes?" he asked, when her luggage had been carried in. "Then we can begin poking round the town. Lots of interesting things to see here. We mustn't waste time."

"Lovely! I'll be ready."

She followed her luggage, and the two charming Frenchwomen who were the proprietors of the small hotel, up the stairs, and was ushered into a large, sunny front room—clean and comfortably furnished. Her efforts at conversation were not very fully understood, but the Frenchwomen smiled so pleasantly and encouragingly, that she was not at all embarrassed. After all, it was great fun to use her schoolgirl French for the first time, and when, in trying to find out where she might get dinner, she used the word 'café,' and one of the Frenchwomen immediately dashed away and returned smiling with a tray on which was steaming coffee, with crisp rolls and wafers of butter, Hilary found that she was enjoying a joke against herself.

"That wasn't a very successful effort on my part," she thought. Still, the coffee looked and smelt delicious, and she had had a very early luncheon on board, so perhaps her ignorance had been a blessing in disguise.

Concealing her astonishment at the sudden appearance of the 'café,' she accepted it with expressions of pleasure, and her two hostesses withdrew, and left her to unpack.

But before unpacking, Hilary sat down to enjoy her so-oddly-ordered repast. How thrilling it all was! The Frenchwomen, the coffee, the foreign sounds and cries in the street below her two long windows! Even the motors had a different hoot, and the tram bells an unfamiliar clang.

And beyond her open shutters, across the narrow street,

the sunlight was bright on the white wall of a house with yellow sunblinds screening the balcony windows. There were green latticed shutters in the upper story. That didn't look like an English house! Nothing looked like England! Even the sunshine was more vivid and colourful. Peeping out into the street she saw a queerly dressed woman selling newspapers, and blowing a little horn as she walked along to call attention to her wares. Oh, lovely! lovely! All so strange! She must hurry to get out a parasol—another hat—some clean gloves—and so be ready for Roger.

CHAPTER IV

A WONDERFUL afternoon! Roger was a splendid guide. He seemed to know everything, and didn't appear to mind how many silly questions she asked him. And Hilary didn't object in the least to his teasing her. In fact she seemed to enjoy the jokes against herself as much as he did. When he remarked casually, in reply to one of her questions, that of course she knew that Bordeaux had belonged to England for three hundred years, and she eyed him in astonishment, and remarked: "It's the first *I've* heard of it!" they found they were both laughing as though that were one of the finest jokes ever made. They saw the lovely fifteenth-century church of St. Michel; the cathedral; the thirteenth-century belfry with its big clock; the old citadel; and all the more modern monuments, and interesting public buildings.

But to Hilary everything was of interest. The open cafés on the pavement with their bright painted chairs and tables; the shops; the passers-by in the wide, tree-bordered boulevards; the streets themselves that seemed to be made up of an intricate pattern of lines—lines of latticed shutters, green, grey, orange: lines of cobbles in the roadway: lines cutting into squares the paving-stones of the sidewalks. She loved the flower-market; the horse fair on the quay; and especially one old street—Pavé des Chartrons. Here, stately eighteen-century houses showed wrought-iron balconies, fanlights, and window grills, like strips of metal lace. Each one was different, and each one was exquisite.

But oh, how tired she was when at last Roger and she sat down in one of the garden squares to rest. In the shade of the big green trees, jean-clad men in berets, and bare-headed, knitting women, sat talking together, while short-skirted children played about them. An old gardener was mowing the grass. How good it smelt, as he stuffed it into a bag he carried! And how cool was the sound of a little stream, murmuring in a tiny waterfall amongst the shrubs, and then spreading in a wide pool where small pink lilies grew, and brilliant flashes of gold from innumerable gold-fish coloured the surface of the water.

A lovely day! Full of joy, and light, and the warm glow of happy companionship. But suddenly saddened—darkened—chilled—by a few words.

"My train goes at one o'clock to-morrow," said Roger.

"Your train!" Hilary turned a stricken face towards him.

"To Bayonne."

Of course! He'd told her before that he wasn't staying in Bordeaux, but she'd been so excited by all this novelty that she hadn't stopped to think of to-morrow: now it suddenly overwhelmed her—the realisation of her terrible loneliness, here in a big strange city, alone, without a friend. Why had she ever imagined that she could face it? She couldn't.

"How far is it?" she asked in a small voice.

"I'm not quite sure of the distance. Takes four hours in the train."

"But which way is it? North, south, east, or west?"

"South. You've heard of Biarritz?"

"Rather!"

"Well, it's only three or four miles from Biarritz to Bayonne."

"Oh, I'd love to see Biarritz. But it's a frightfully expensive place, isn't it?"

"Not now. The season doesn't start for two months yet. I don't suppose a pension there at present would be as dear as an hotel here."

"And what's the fare?"

"About ten shillings, second class."

Hilary turned a suddenly shining face towards him. "I'm going to Biarritz to-morrow. Oh, not to Bayonne. I won't inflict myself on you any more. You've been almost too kind already, and I'm not going to impose on your good nature further."

"You won't mind my travelling in the same carriage with you, will you?"

"Not a bit, if you particularly want to."

"Or my seeing you occasionally during my three days' stay in Bayonne?"

"You may call upon me at my pension."

"Which is it to be?"

"The cheapest I can find. Where do I get a list?"

"We can buy a guide at Cook's I expect, and we can book your ticket there. Come along, you've got to have a look at Goya's house."

"Who's Goya?" How ignorant she was, but Roger didn't seem to mind.

"The great Spanish painter. He died here about a hundred years ago. Don't be lazy now. We've got lots more to see before dinner."

"When's dinner?"

"Eight o'clock."

"Where's dinner?"

"At the best restaurant in Bordeaux, and you're my guest."

She smiled at him with soft eyes. "What a dear you are!"

Suddenly Roger was conscious that it wasn't quite as a sister he regarded her.

CHAPTER V

THE rain beat in slanting streaks against the railway carriage window, as the train puffed along next day, through pine woods and gorse-covered country, carrying them southward to Bayonne. Dark forests and grey skies combined to make a somewhat sombre picture, but Hilary and Roger were cheerful enough. And Hilary again was conscious of a thrilling sense of excitement in viewing the new series of pictures spread out before her. For though the pine woods seemed almost interminable, and the showers very frequent, there were gaps in the forest, and there were intervals of fairer weather. And then the train would run into a village where one saw a square towered church; whitewashed houses with peacock-blue doors and windows; men and women ploughing in the fields with harnessed oxen; or driving these patient beasts in little two-wheeled carts. These were Basque villages, Roger told her, and now they were in the country of the Basques —people neither French nor Spanish, and unlike any other nation in the world.

At Bayonne Hilary had to change for Biarritz. Roger saw her into her train, and stood on the platform waving her farewell. It wasn't to be a long farewell; they were to meet next morning.

And yet, as Hilary sank back into the corner of the carriage—empty save for herself—a horrid desolation fell upon her. She took herself sternly to task. How absurd to miss Roger so much! Why, she'd only known him four

days! Four days or four years, what did it matter? He was a jolly companion, a friend—and she was just a very homesick girl, adrift in a foreign land. She hadn't a notion of what Biarritz and the pension would be like.

In less than half an hour she knew. She had an impression of fine streets, rain-swept and deserted; towering empty hotels; big brown rocks with an angry, wind-driven sea hurling itself over them in sheets and fountains of foam; a long sweep of beach with a lighthouse on a far headland; and on another headland, facing the stormy stretch of the Atlantic Ocean, her pension.

The building occupied a wonderful position, perched up here high on the cliff looking out across the sea to the horizon; but the prospect this afternoon was wild and desolate. And the pension itself, though possibly quite a good one of its kind, was not calculated to create a very favourable impression upon the drooping spirits of a tired and lonely girl. The wide, wind-filled passage was dreary with pale varnish and linoleum; from the shabby salon came the sound of a tinny piano painfully played; the dining-room, as she passed it on her way to the staircase, looked cold and forlorn, with bare polished floor, and white lace curtains at the windows, its sole ornamentation two large vases filled with brown chenille flowers and artificial foliage, placed on a chocolate-coloured mantelpiece. Hilary's room was clean. The whole place was perfectly clean and well-ordered. But after dinner, which she had eaten at a little table all alone amongst a crowd of strangers, none of whom spoke English, there remained the evening to live through. Back in her bedroom—the wind howling up the cliff from the sea, shrieking round the corners of the house, and rattling at her window, Hilary was conscious of a growing sense of heart-sickening loneliness. What could she do? Settle down to a book? To letter-writing? Why, oh why, had she refused to allow Roger to come over from Bayonne this evening to see her? He'd wanted to.

A knock at her door! The smiling chambermaid to

say that M'sieur was below in the salon. Hilary's knowledge of French was equal to that! Roger had come after all! Blessings on the name of Roger!

He was feeling a bit dull all by himself in Bayonne, he explained; and as motor buses were running every ten minutes or so between the two places, it seemed foolish not to come along, and see if she were fixed up all right at the pension.

"Foolish, do you say?" echoed Hilary. "Criminal you mean."

They were on their way down to the Casino now. They were going to dance. Gone were all the blue devils of nostalgia and loneliness. Life was rose-coloured and gay once more!

At the Casino uniformed officials flung open the glass doors before them. In the brightly lighted ball-room many couples were dancing: not a very smart assemblage —shop girls from the town—clerks from offices—practically no visitors in Biarritz as yet. But what did Hilary and Roger care for that? The floor was good, the band was excellent, and they both danced well. They were thoroughly enjoying their evening.

Through the thick green plush curtains they walked into the hall where the Boule tables were set. Hilary staked ten francs on number seven. The ball rolled. "Sept!" called the croupier.

"Oh, I've won!" she exclaimed delightedly. She staked and won again. Then lost, and lost again. Now she was no better off than when she started.

"Baccarat's better fun than this," said Roger. "There's sure to be a Baccarat Room somewhere here."

"Oh, let's go and watch them playing!" begged Hilary.

Roger duly made inquiries, and received directions. They made their way along another curtained corridor, paid for their tickets of admission, and waited until these were duly written out and handed to them. That being done, a gorgeous flunkey in red plush waistcoat, knee-

breeches, white stockings and black shoes, and a blue coat, with a gesture as splendid as his livery, swung wide the double doors and they were ushered into the innermost sanctuary of the Casino—the Baccarat Room!

There was a thick red carpet on the floor, green plush chairs and sofas were ranged against the walls, and green plush curtains draped the long windows opening out on to the terrace. These windows were closed to-night. They shut out the wild night—the sound of the big Atlantic breakers thundering on the beach below the Casino. Shut out the sudden squalls of wind and driving rain. Here all was warm, exciting, intimate! Round the green baize oval tables, above which shone the orange shaded lights, sat the players. Behind them a fringe of men and women stood—the punters—all ready to back when the croupier called "Avec la table!" or individually waiting for a chance to call "Banco!" and take a hand.

Hilary had advanced to the centre table, watching eagerly—delightedly. Suddenly she turned to Roger. "Why, I've played it!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "It's chemey."

"Played it? Where?"

"In London." The memory of that evening—the evening of her first meeting with Feltman—sobered her for a moment; but only for a moment. The whole scene here was so new—so entrancing.

"I won quite a lot when I played before," she said. "I must try my luck." But at first she couldn't understand all the croupiers were saying. "Banco avec la table!" That was simple enough. It meant that anyone could bet. She moved farther along the table, and leant forward over the shoulder of the man in front of her, to put down a hundred franc note on the green baize.

The man looked up. "À cheval, Madame?"

She didn't understand. He smiled, and spoke immediately in English. "Your money is astride of the line now—à cheval—you'd only get paid on fifty if you win. Is that as you wish?"

His English was good, but it wasn't quite the English of an Englishman. He had smiling grey eyes, an attractive, rather mischievous, clean-shaven face. He couldn't be much under thirty, yet Hilary suddenly thought of Peter Pan, the boy who wouldn't grow up.

"No, I want it all on," she said.

He pushed it forward—clear of the line. "There! You'll win!" He himself was taking the bank. But she didn't win. He turned up the Queen of Clubs, and the nine of Spades. "Neuf," said the croupier, and away went Hilary's hundred francs.

"Too bad!" said the winner. "Better luck next time. Double your stake then, Madame."

There was a short interval before it was again 'avec la table.' Then Hilary put down two hundred francs. This time the luck was against the bank, and she won.

"Good! What did I tell you, Madame?"

Yet of course, though punting was amusing, she would much prefer to sit at the table. That was far more exciting. This game wasn't nearly as big as the one she had played for Feltman. You weren't obliged to put up more than a hundred francs for the bank here: that is, only about sixteen shillings. It wouldn't hurt anyone to lose that. But there wasn't a place vacant at any of the tables. "Play here if you wish," said her new friend, rising.

"Oh, why should I . . ."

"Perhaps your husband would like . . ."

"He's not my husband," said Hilary quickly, laughing a trifle confusedly. "And I'm not 'Madame.'" She spoke without thinking. What a fool to say that! What did it matter to this stranger who or what she was? She knew that she was blushing, and was furious with herself. So to cover her embarrassment, she seated herself quite calmly at the table, and after thanking him in a rather off-hand fashion, she spoke to him no more.

She took her bank—won it—and then rose. The young man was still standing behind her. "Thanks very

much," she said coolly. "It was kind of you to let me play."

"Not at all. The pleasure was mine—to watch you . . . Mademoiselle."

He was laughing at her! Aware of her confusion—enjoying it—teasing her. Teasing her in a more subtle fashion than Roger did. For in spite of his Peter Pannish air, he was far more sophisticated than Roger would ever be.

For some unaccountable reason Hilary was suddenly angry. She turned to Roger, and smiled at him—her sweetest, kindest smile. "Let's go back and dance," she said. "It's dull here." But she was aware that she wasn't speaking the truth. It wasn't dull. She loved the excitement of it, and she knew that she would play again. She knew, too, though she did not look in his direction, that the young man who had given up his place to her was not deceived by her air of cool disdain. He was still finding her amusing. Still laughing at her.

CHAPTER VI

AT Bayonne next day—a glorious day of hot sunshine —Hilary and Roger were again busy sight-seeing. As in Bordeaux, Roger was acting as showman to the old historic town. He seemed to know everything. Hilary had already realised that there was nothing he enjoyed quite so much as imparting information. Well, that suited her admirably. It saved her the trouble of reading up any guide-books for herself, and it gave Roger pleasure. An excellent arrangement altogether. Yet at times Hilary was vaguely conscious that she would like to linger a little—to *feel* herself back into the past—instead of assimilating quite so many dates and facts. That, as Roger pointed out later to her, was obviously absurd; for how could she ' feel ' herself an old Roman of the fourth century if she hadn't known the Romans were here at that time building these great stone walls to surround and fortify the city? Nothing would have suggested Romans to her if she hadn't known the facts.

" If *you* hadn't known them, you mean," said Hilary.

Well, if he hadn't known them then, and passed them on to her. And how could she ' feel ' herself an English stonemason of the Middle Ages, helping to build that lovely twin-spired cathedral, with the English arms set high up in the roof within it, if he hadn't told her that from 1152 to 1453, Bayonne, like Bordeaux, belonged to England? And that the cathedral was begun in 1213, two years before King John at Runnymede was forced to sign the Magna Charta?

No! Hilary agreed he was quite right. One must have facts to build on. The trouble was, she liked only a small foundation of fact on which to rear a large edifice of fancy; and Roger seemed to want all facts. He couldn't be a very imaginative artist, she thought. But she kept that reflection to herself.

The old grassed ramparts were hot in the morning sunshine, except where the big elms cast their shadow; and Hilary putting her hand on the stones of ancient Roman towers, wondered what other human hands had brushed these walls. What other men and women, down through the long centuries, had stood where she stood now, looking up at the same blue sky, feeling the same warmth of the sun, the same breath of the wind from the sea! The men and women passed away. The grey stones stayed.

But Hilary herself was not allowed to stay. Neither on the ramparts; nor in the narrow, high-walled streets (the houses built in so many stories, so Roger told her, because a walled and fortified city can only expand upwards, not outwards); nor in the picturesque markets along the river bank; nor under the plane trees by the Chateau Vieux—that massive medieval fortress, built on a portion of the old Roman wall. Hilary wanted to linger here. This was a castle in which the Black Prince had once lived; where Catherine de Medici, it is said, planned the massacre of St. Bartholomew; and where Napoleon forced Charles IV of Spain to give up his crown and all his rights to Joseph, Napoleon's brother.

So much of human thirst for power, had that old fortress seen!

"Can't stay here all day," said Roger. "Come along. We've got to see the Musée Bonnat, and the Musée Basque yet."

Hilary struck at that. Lunch first, she said. "To go right through from the fourth century and the Roman Empire, to Napoleon's day, on a cup of coffee and a roll, is asking too much of any human creature."

" You should have ordered an œuf-à-la-coque for breakfast."

" What on earth's that? "

" A boiled egg. I had one."

However, Roger himself wasn't averse to the idea of a meal, and so they stopped at one of the restaurants, where they could sit outside, under a colonnade, and ordered déjeuner. ' Lovely, these French meals! ' thought Hilary. The omelettes, and the chicken, and the dressed artichokes, and the crisp rolls, and the white wine. On one side of them stretched the shining, white-bridged river, and on the other the noisy street: little one-horsed victorias jerking along over the cobbled stones; quick and animated French voices; smell of coffee and tobacco; and above all the tall houses with their latticed shutters (volets, Roger said they were), making green, and grey, and blue, and orange patterns, on white-painted walls.

Across the road was the shadowed courtyard of a doctor's house.

" Sonnette de Jour! " read Hilary aloud; and then: " Sonnette de Nuit! " and was quite pleased to translate a new French phrase: " Day bell. Night bell. Oh, I'm learning fast! " she remarked, and then asked the garçon for ' le compte,' at which Roger laughed, and told her she should have said, ' l'addition.' And in any case she wasn't going to pay the bill. He was.

No, she wouldn't allow him to do that. She'd pay for herself, with her own money.

Her own money? Or Feltman's money?

Ridiculous! What had Feltman to do with her affairs? Nothing at all. He belonged to an episode over and done with. Something she meant to forget—that she was fast forgetting.

It was so pleasant sitting here in the open air, that déjeuner was prolonged indefinitely; and when they did eventually get up, even Roger's energy had slackened.

" It's the last glass that does it," said Hilary reflectively. " I told you not to finish the bottle. If you were honest,

you'd admit that what you'd really like now would be a nice little nap."

Roger disdained to reply to this. They had strolled out upon the bridge across the wide flood of the Adour. A wooded hill rose above the railway station on the farther bank. A battered collier discharged her dusty cargo at the quay. What would the Romans, the crusaders and knights of the Middle Ages think of the twentieth century's contribution to the beauty of the city? Hilary wondered.

"Railway station, abattoir, prison," murmured Roger, reading from his map.

"You're not going to drag me across there to look at those, are you?" asked Hilary, making a face at him.

"No. I'll spare you those. There's still the Musée Basque and the Musée Bonnat to see."

"And there's still to-morrow," said Hilary firmly. "Now I vote we go quietly back to Biarritz, and find a nice, quiet, sunny corner on the beach, where we can have a nice quiet chat."

"It's you who are sleepy," Roger accused her.

"I won't deny that I'm pleasantly tired," she admitted. But she wouldn't admit—not even to herself—that though Roger was a good friend, and she would be desperately lonely here without him, he was not only like John Harper in appearance, but resembled him in other ways also. 'Poor old Roger!' she thought. Why poor old Roger? Would he also fail to pay money for a place?

In a flurried, confused fashion, she dismissed these half-glimpsed treacheries. Thank goodness, Roger wasn't in love with her! With friends—even dear friends—you were allowed sometimes to be just the teeniest, weeniest bit . . . no, she wouldn't say bored—she wouldn't! How good Roger was! A perfect dear! She was an ungrateful little cat not to give him her whole mind—every scrap of her closest attention—during every second she was with him.

"Do you want to go back to Biarritz?" he asked, now.

"I think so—don't you?"

Yes. He thought so. In the end he always would think just what Hilary thought. Always? Well, at least as long as he believed her to be the kind of girl he expected all his womenkind to be. A 'good' girl. Was that just a little like 'poor old John'? Perhaps it was a little like most men!

CHAPTER VII

THEY had tea at the Casino, where the band played, and a few couples danced. And after tea they wandered past the Boule tables, through the Reading Room, out on to the terrace.

"You can see quite a lot of the English papers here, if you want to," said Roger.

"But I don't want to see quite a lot of them. I want to see as little as I can of them," said Hilary. "I've even carefully avoided looking at the *Continental Daily Mail*. Why think of London when we've got this?"

They had stepped out from the French windows on to the terraced balcony, overlooking the sands. The wide blue sea stretched, calm and empty, to the horizon, and warm sunshine lay over the almost deserted plage. Biarritz to-day was bathed in a gentle languor after the storms of yesterday. To the left, the high headland of the Atalaye shut out the panorama of the coast-line; but Hilary had seen it earlier in the afternoon, and in her mind could picture now, the bays and headlands stretching mistily to the coast of Spain—the serrated line of the Pyrenees against the sky. And yet, although the sea was unruffled, and all the feathery tamarisk trees were scarcely stirring, the big waves seemed as fierce as ever. They came thundering in on to the sunny beach below the terrace, and farther out great walls of water poured foaming over the brown rocks, and fountains of spray rose almost as high as the pinnacled figure of the Virgin, on the Rocher de la Vierge.

"What time does play start in the Baccarat Room?" asked Hilary suddenly.

"Do you want to play again?"

"Yes, I think so."

"You said it was dull last night."

"Well, we needn't stay if we don't like it. We can always go back and dance. Let's try our luck just for a few minutes."

"Very well."

Why didn't Roger say: "No, I'm damned if you'll play again. Come along and dance?" she'd have liked him so much better, if he didn't always let her have her own way. Would she? Wouldn't she only get rather petulant and disagreeable with him, as she'd done with John on those (very infrequent) occasions when he had opposed his will to hers? The caveman in theory sounded attractive, but would he be so in reality? After all, it was pleasanter to get one's own way. Yes, but without a little opposition of some sort, life might become most deadly dull. Hilary dismissed these thoughts impatiently. Why in one's own mind must one always be arguing in this fashion? Was it because she began to feel that there was just the faintest possibility that Roger might resemble John still further—might ask her . . .

"After all," she said aloud, forcing her mind away from a possibility which disturbed her, and returning to the subject in hand: "our tickets are available for the Baccarat Room for a fortnight. It's a pity to waste them."

How like Nan that sounded! Nan! Very far away all that part of her life seemed now; and yet in about ten days she must return to it. Well, no use thinking about it now. Here was sunshine, Biarritz, and baccarat!

They made their way along the corridor, and the liveried flunkeys threw open the doors at their approach; but it was early, and only one of the croupiers was installed at present. Another sat making up the cards.

Play at his table had not yet started. Hilary secured a place next to the croupier's high chair. Roger declined to play, but stood behind her. He would punt when the opportunity arose. "Anyhow, we shan't be staying long," he said.

A wallet on the table to Hilary's left indicated a place already booked. Two women moved forward, and one put a question to the croupier. Although Hilary did not understand the woman's French, she guessed the purport of her query, and guessed, too, her nationality—British, of sorts. The woman turned to her companion. "Yes! He says that place is engaged. Larrialde is sitting there. Take the place the other side of him. He's a crazy idiot—but not a bad sort—a fool with his money, of course."

"I like those sort of fools."

It might have been Gina talking! Gina, whose voice had come over the 'phone that night to save her from . . .

Why couldn't she forget all that? Hilary brought her attention back to the two women discussing this man called Larrialde, who was to play it seemed, beside her.

"Oh, he's not that sort of fool—the sort you mean. He's shrewd—except here. He chucks his money away here, gambling."

"Got plenty to chuck it seems."

"Rather! He's rolling in it."

"Why doesn't he live in Paris?"

"He's here for his health. Supposed to have weak lungs."

"The Baccarat Room till four every morning is very good for lungs, I should think."

The two women laughed. They seemed quite oblivious to the fact that Hilary might overhear their conversation. Possibly they took her for a French-woman who wouldn't understand; or more probably, like the majority of women of their class, they weren't discreet,

and they didn't bother to regulate their conversation in public.

"He's got a house in a village somewhere in the country round about here. They say it's the same old farmhouse his grandfather had—I don't know."

"Did Grandpa live near Biarritz then?"

"Yes, he was just a common Basque farmer, but he went away to the Argentine or somewhere, and made money. That's what the Basques do. After they've made their pile they come home and buy back the old farmhouse, and do it all up with baths and basins till it doesn't know itself."

"Funny idea! Is that what this one did?"

"I expect so. Yes, I believe he did. And then *his* son—this Pierre Larrialde's father—made more money. Pots of it. Invented something for motors in Paris."

"And Pierre has the spending of what Dad and Granddad made?"

"That's right. See that woman just coming in? She's the one I told you about that the Spaniard took the flat for."

They lowered their voices now, as 'the woman the Spaniard took the flat for' was approaching the table. But Hilary wasn't interested in her. She was far more interested in Pierre Larrialde. The scraps of conversation she'd heard were to her, in spite of their surface banality, instinct with romance. The poor young farmer, so many years ago, going out into the unknown world to seek his fortune! At one of the Bordeaux wharves she'd seen a big South American emigrant steamer. That was the way the Basque farmers went out, she knew—the way this Pierre Larrialde's grandfather would have gone: though it would have been in a more primitive steam packet, fifty or sixty years ago.

And Pierre himself—the spendthrift grandson—living in the old 'made over' family farmhouse, and spending his days and nights in riotous living, what of him?

Of course he ought to be some romantic young hero, as

handsome as Apollo. In reality he would probably be unattractive, plain, and dull. He might even have a black beard, like the Frenchman who sat next to her in the saloon, during the voyage to Bordeaux. Hilary felt that a black beard would be a serious handicap to any hero. The croupier was calling to the players to take their places. A man sat down in the chair beside her. This was Pierre Larrialde. Hilary turned a side-glance in his direction. It wasn't a bearded face; it was clean-shaven, and if he was not handsome, at least he was not ill-favoured. He was not a stranger; again his grey eyes mocked her as he gave her a little ironical bow of recognition.

"It is not so dull then after all, Mademoiselle?" said Pierre Larrialde. Pierre—Peter—Peter Pan! "Perhaps you would prefer your friend to take my seat? If so I can move. . . ."

"Not at all," said Roger. "I don't care enough about it. I'm only going to punt."

Was there the faintest touch of sarcasm in Larrialde's ready politeness? If it were so, Roger didn't seem to notice it. Hilary told herself that Larrialde wasn't really being politely rude. Revenging himself for her cool dismissal of him the previous evening. But even if he were, she would ignore it. She wasn't going to allow him to disturb her a second time, nor should he drive her away from the table.

The game began. It seemed as far as they two were concerned, to resolve itself into a curious sort of duel. They were almost always opposed to one another; and yet when they were adversaries Larrialde was a very smiling, debonair opponent. Hilary tried to convince herself that this sense of contest between them was created only by her own imagination. In all probability it was non-existent. Her neighbour showed no sign of antagonism. He was invariably polite; translating the croupier's phrases for her; helping her in her small difficulties with the French money; and turning to talk

quite amiably to Roger. And yet beneath it all there seemed a hint of mockery. It was as though he guessed that he embarrassed her, and took a mischievous delight in doing so.

At the end of two hours Roger suggested that they'd better have dinner, and Hilary was swiftly conscious of remorse. Two hours! Had she been playing for two hours? Poor old Roger! He didn't really care for gambling, and anyhow punting was pretty dull. She was abominably selfish to keep him here.

She rose at once. " Yes, we'll go," she said.

" Always leave the table winning, Mademoiselle. That's wise."

" Yes, so I've been told before."

Told by whom? Why need the thought of Feltman haunt her so? She gathered up her winnings. Roger had moved across the room to get her coat, and Larrialde also had risen, so that they stood facing one another.

" I think you find some pleasure in laughing at people, don't you? " she said to him suddenly.

" Perhaps I do," he replied, not in the least put out by this direct attack. " We're all very amusing, don't you think? So important to ourselves, and of so little value in reality. And if I laugh at others, at least I laugh more at myself."

She said no more to him, but turned to Roger. He handed her the coat. " You've been lucky? "

" Yes. I've won nearly a thousand francs. That's about eight pounds, isn't it? "

" Something of the sort."

They were moving down the long room. Behind them were the green baize tables, and the gamblers under the orange-shaded electric bulbs. Yet, through the open French windows, one could see beyond the terrace, the beach, the tossing breakers, and the lighthouse on the far headland, distinct and clear in the glow of the setting sun. The ordered day went on. Sun, wind, and sea cared nothing for the little feverish lives of men and women.

Hilary knew that the stupid, trivial scene with Larrialde had shaken her. Perhaps that was why she was suddenly conscious of fear. Not fear of material things, but of the superb indifference of nature to all the sorrow of mankind. She wanted to put out the hands of her spirit to cling to some other human creature for comfort and support.

"Why so solemn?" asked Roger.

"Solemn?" She came back from far away, and flashed a smile at him. "Was I solemn? I was probably wondering what we're going to have for dinner. That's always a very serious consideration."

She knew that neither to John nor to Roger could she ever show the secret places of her soul.

But to make up for this that she withheld from him—the reality of herself—the surface Hilary was to Roger more than ever sweet and companionable. She tried to steer clear of any suggestion of flirtation. Tried to make it apparent to Roger, that though she gave him both affection and respect, she did not give him that something else which only could be given to the man she loved. Probably it would never be given to anyone. Had love, as it appeared in poetry and fiction, any relation to real life? That Hilary didn't know. Her life was still to be lived. Later she might be able to answer that question —answer it for herself at any rate—but she could not answer it now.

Most of the following day she spent with Roger. They saw the Musée Basque, and the Musée Bonnat together; and when Roger decided to do a little sketching, Hilary wandered round Bayonne alone. It had taken her some time to persuade Roger to work. He was shirking it abominably, she told him, and he had only one more day in Bayonne. All the more reason to spend every minute of his time with Hilary, he seemed to think. But Hilary thought otherwise.

She had been interested at the Musée Basque to see the pictures of Basque people, and their homes; and the

life-sized model of an old Basque farmhouse. This was the kind of place in which Pierre Larrialde's grandfather had been born. The peasant lad who went out into the unknown to seek his fortune. And now Larrialde himself lived—when he wasn't at the Casino—in a similar abode: though he wouldn't be likely to have the animals—cows, goats, and the oxen used for ploughing, and drawing the little chariot-like carts—stabled on the ground floor of his dwelling, beneath the living-rooms, as his ancestors had done. How had his grandfather improved the house, she wondered? The English consul had talked of Larrialde to Roger. He was pure Basque. The rise of his family's fortunes, and his own passion for gambling, made him a subject for gossip, both in Bayonne and Biarritz. He had been to school in England: that was why his English was so good.

As she wandered round the Basque museum, Hilary learnt a little of this unique small nation. Its customs, pastimes, costumes, and queer language which is unlike any other in the world.

Then at the Musée Bonnat, her quick sense of romance was stirred by the thought of the poor boy Bonnat, who won his way to world-wide fame and fortune, and who, to show his gratitude to his native town—the town which had helped him during his early days of poverty and struggle—gave to Bayonne this priceless collection of his own, and other famous artists' pictures.

But of the two places her mind more often travelled back to the Musée Basque. Though Larrialde had annoyed her, he had interested her as well. And through him, she was trying now to see the whole Basque nation. Of course he might be far from typical of his fellow-countrymen. His father's wealth, and his own education abroad, would probably have made of him a different being to the peasant class from which his ancestors had sprung. The Basques were quick and courageous, honest and ardent, fond of games of skill—the universal love of their national game of Pelota was evidence of that; fond too

of masquerades, of singing and dancing. Good lovers and good haters. A fine and spirited race. Was Larrialde all that? Perhaps deep in the fibres of his being these racial traits persisted. But they were overlaid with cynicism and sophistication. Perhaps so deeply overlaid as to be completely buried. Hilary was not skilful enough to analyse his character—to sum him up—after so short a knowledge of the man; but some of this she vaguely felt. Perhaps she was mistaken. She knew that she wanted to meet him again. Her curiosity concerning him was roused. And it wasn't only a personal curiosity. In that she was quite sincere. He was a Basque, and the Pays Basque had already cast its spell about her.

CHAPTER VIII

SHE met him again that evening in the Baccarat Room, and greeted him in a more friendly spirit. The Musée Basque had softened her antagonism. But they were not much together. Roger wanted to dance, and Hilary couldn't refuse to do what he wished this evening, for it was his last night in Biarritz. He was to leave Bayonne late in the afternoon next day.

All that last evening, the following morning, and until the actual moment of farewell, Hilary managed to avoid anything in the nature of a definite declaration by Roger of his affection for her. She had tried to make it plain to him that they were friends—good friends—and would never be anything more. But now, standing on the Bayonne railway platform, Roger suddenly threatened to cut short his sketching tour: to return to Biarritz in less than a week, and travel back to England in the steamer with her.

"But I mayn't go from Bordeaux. Perhaps I'll go by train to Paris." This parting was proving more painful than she had anticipated. "No, Roger, I've told you I won't see you again until we meet in London in a month or two. You came out here to work, and I shall know I've spoilt everything for you if you alter all your plans. Please don't make me feel such a little rotter. You promised you would work."

Yes, Roger knew he'd promised. He knew, too, that he *must* work. He couldn't afford this trip purely for pleasure. But he looked so wretched as he stood there on

the station platform, that Hilary felt wretched too, and wondered what she could say or do to make him happier.

" You don't mind my going. You don't care a damn," said Roger bitterly.

What could she answer? She did mind, but not as Roger minded. Why was it that one was powerless to comfort another's suffering? Roger wanted her love, and she hadn't any love to give him. In spite of his having said hearts had grown tougher in the last twenty-five years, Roger had found his just as soft as any of a previous generation; but he'd get over this first infatuation, she knew. Yet, that didn't make his present pain more bearable. If she could cure his heartache? Administer a bitter medicine, and so be cruelly kind?

" Do you remember on the steamer I said the sea had changed me? " she asked abruptly. " Well, so it had in a way—but not altogether. If I'd really changed I wouldn't have behaved so selfishly towards you."

" You haven't been selfish. You couldn't help being sweet."

" Couldn't I? " returned Hilary. " I could as easily have shown the very unsweet, selfish, grabbing side of me. I'm weak and pleasure-loving, and I get carried away by excitement. That's led me to do all sorts of things of which I'm ashamed. To allow a man to kiss me in order to get money from him."

" I don't believe you'd do that. You've always insisted on paying for yourself everywhere here."

" With money given to me by that same man."

" Hilary! "

" It's true. Oh, you don't know a bit the sordid sort of life I've led. The stories I've laughed at. The awful parties I've been to. Every penny I've been using here I got from that man. And after he gave it to me—oh, I knew why he gave it to me—I ran away from his flat. That was why I travelled out to Bordeaux on Gina's ticket. He was depraved—horrible. I was afraid he'd find me if I stayed in London."

" And yet you kept his . . . his dirty money? "

" Yes, I kept his money. Perhaps that's partly too, why I ran away. I didn't want to give it back. I'm using it to pay for my expenses here." She tried to look at him bravely, but she knew that her eyes were shamed and humiliated. " I'm what they call a gold-digger, you see. Oh, I know lots of quite decent girls nowadays take money from men. But so do . . . women in the street take money from men—they sell themselves. I sold my self-respect when I took that money. And I'm not repentant, you know. I'm still keeping it. Still using it to buy frocks and pleasure. Am I any better than the woman in the street? I've cheated a little more, that's all."

Had she merely hurt him still further by destroying his faith in her, she wondered, or would her confession, like the quick and painful cauterising of a poisonous wound, effect a cure? Her conduct hadn't seemed so bad to her when no one but herself knew what she had done. Now, dragged out into the light of day, it looked degraded and contemptible.

" You'll pay it back," said Roger.

She shook her head. " No, I won't. How can I? Besides, why should I? I've told you I'm unrepentant." In another two minutes the train would go. Her voice changed. " Roger, if I hadn't liked you—awfully—been grateful to you for your kindness, I'd never have told you that."

" Why *did* you tell me? "

" Because I don't want you to—to be fond of me."

" I don't care what you've done. I know you'd never do anything really wrong. I love you, Hilary! "

" Roger! "

" And you don't love me."

" As a friend, Roger."

" Nothing more? "

She shook her head.

" Never? "

" Never."

The train was already moving. Roger jumped in. " All right. Good-bye."

Hilary waved until the train was out of sight. But she knew when she moved away from the railway station the truth of the French phrase: ' to say good-bye is to die a little.' This parting was not to her the sorrow it was to Roger, but it hurt her nevertheless. And her effort to disillusion him had hurt her too. Why had she yielded to that impulse to confess herself so small and mean? It was because she wanted to help him. It was because in seeing him suffer, she suffered too. She was so grateful to him for all he'd done for her; she wanted to ease his heartache, and knew of no other way to do it than to make him think ill of her. Her heart was filled with tenderness and affection for him, but it wasn't love. She knew that well enough.

She'd told him she didn't mean to pay that money back to Feltman. Now, more than anything else in the world, she longed to do it—wanted to feel she owed Dan Feltman nothing. Well, she still had over forty pounds intact; for though she had made a few purchases, and paid her own expenses, she had increased her capital at the Casino.

The Casino! The Baccarat Room! She had won on each occasion she had played, both here and in London. Luck seemed to follow some people, that was a well-known fact. And every time she played, she left the table when she was winning. If one always did that one couldn't lose!

On the first occasion Feltman had told her to stop; on the second she had left the table merely to show Larrialde how unimportant both he and the game were to her; and on the next two occasions Roger had suggested that she should cease playing. Not once had she stopped merely because her good sense told her to do so. But she didn't think of this. She was all on fire to play again. To play in a business-like fashion. To make enough money to repay Feltman, and to keep her going for a

week or two in London—until Nan sent back her money, or she found a job. It was quite easy to walk into the Baccarat Room alone. No one would think it odd. Lots of women did it—well-known and respected residents of the town. Others also, but those Hilary did not take into consideration. She wouldn't go back to the pension this afternoon. She would go straight to the Casino. They would have started play again by this time.

Yes, that was the thing to do! To win enough money to repay Feltman every penny he had given her. When that was done she would be free. Then she could start her life afresh.

Half an hour later Hilary was seated in the Baccarat Room.

CHAPTER IX

FOR the next three days and nights Hilary seemed to live in a trance—a gambling trance. From the hour in the afternoon when play commenced until the game ended—often after sunrise—she sat at the table. Even in her dreams she heard the continual cry of the croupiers. "Banco!" "Quatre-huit." "Rien ne va plus." "C'est fini." "Banco est fait." "Baccarat." "Banco!" "Banco suivi." "Sept-neuf." "Banco avec la table. Faites vos jeux." "Le banco n'est pas demandé!"

She had no other thought beyond the green baize tables, the cards, and the piles of paper money, and green plaques and red and yellow jetons. The liveried attendants grew to know her well. They rushed to serve her. To bring her a tray with coffee and petit-fours. To hold her coat for her. To push her chair forward. She was winning fairly steadily, not in any sensational manner, but in small sums; and she tipped well for every trifling service. She had become almost as well known a figure here as Pierre Larrialde. He, she knew now, had no other life but this: to play as long as the sessions lasted: to motor home to the old farmhouse: to sleep, and to wake only to play again. What a life! And for a man who was supposed to be in Biarritz for the benefit of his health!

In pitying him for his folly, Hilary did not for a moment draw any comparison between his case and her own. She was playing in a very cautious fashion; risking

sums which would appear trifling to him; and playing for a special purpose—in order to win money to repay a debt. Then again, his gambling was an established habit. Hers was to be only of a few days' duration. When she had won enough . . .

Yes, when! But when was that? She had now nearly fifteen thousand francs in her possession. That was well over a hundred pounds. Quite enough to discharge her obligations here in Biarritz, to pay her fare back to London, and to repay Feltman the full sixty pounds she owed him. But, after all, that would leave her with very little on her arrival in London; and there were debts to be paid. She must continue playing, and so win just a trifle more. When she reached the sum equivalent to two hundred pounds in English money she would stop.

On the fourth evening luck suddenly turned against her. She lost again and again. After nearly four thousand of her fifteen thousand francs had melted away, she got up from her seat. Better give the game a rest for a few minutes, or change her table.

It was a warm night, and she moved towards one of the open French windows. Just as she reached it a man came in from the terrace. It was Larrialde.

He smiled at her. " Wanting a breath of fresh air? It's a lovely night."

" Yes." She parted the curtains, looking out. The sky was clear, and as a little hissing accompaniment to the steady drone of the croupiers calls: " Banco! " " Banco est fait." " Cinq-huit." " Banco suivi." " Sept-baccarat ": the sound of the sea came to them. The moon was hidden by the bulk of the Casino to the left, and here the terrace was in shadow; but towards the lighthouse they could see in the moonlight, the loom of the big hotels facing the sea. Every few seconds the beam of the lighthouse flashed, and then was dark.

" You play alone now? " said Larrialde. " Your friend doesn't come any more? "

" He's gone away," said Hilary.

He looked at her for a moment a little queerly, she thought.

" You're staying on? "

" Just for a day or two."

" And then? "

" Then I go back to London."

" Have you been lucky here—playing? "

" Yes—rather. To-night I've been losing a little. Of course I only play a small game. Not like yours."

" How do you know what I play? "

" I've watched you, and I've heard people talk."

He shrugged his shoulders gaily. " Oh, they exaggerate. Never believe half you hear, and only half you see." He smiled again at her. " Come along, and sit beside me at my table. I'll find a place. Look! The cards are made up."

He found her a chair beside his own, and they sat down. Here a bigger game was played than at the table where Hilary usually sat. Well, all the more chance to win back the money she had lost. The excitement was greater too, with higher stakes.

On her first bank she won four times, and then passed it. Now it lost. She had passed it in time!

She couldn't count her winnings, but they amounted to a pretty considerable sum, she knew. Yet, later, the pile dwindled, and soon it was gone completely.

She was playing a little more recklessly now, endeavouring to get back what she had lost. But still the luck ran against her. However, she was enjoying the thrill of it all, and bad luck couldn't last for ever. She still had quite a substantial amount to come and go upon.

She had no idea of the passing of time. And when at last the tired croupiers rose from their seats it was broad daylight.

Larrialde walked with her to the entrance. The rosy light of sunrise was over the blue sea, and the white breakers foamed up on to the deserted beach.

" Have you far to go? " he asked.

She pointed towards the hill. " Up there."

" I'll drive you in my car."

" Don't bother."

" It's no bother."

She thanked him, and got in.

A Citroën! John's car had been a Citroën. She smiled to herself. Beyond the name, this didn't bear much resemblance to John's shabby old bus.

At her pension she alighted. " They'll begin to think I'm not respectable if I keep these awful hours," she said, laughing.

Again, she thought, he eyed her just a little strangely; and as he drove away she suddenly thought: ' Of course. He imagines that too.' But the idea didn't distress her. In fact she found it rather amusing. He was so entirely mistaken in his evident summing up of the situation with regard to Roger and herself. She took a somewhat malicious delight in knowing him to be mistaken. It wasn't often that his judgment was at fault: she recognised that instinctively, and it pleased her sense of mischief to know that here, at least, he was in error. It gave her a feeling of superiority. She was ' even ' with him now for having laughed at her when first they met.

But if the misapprehension under which Larrialde laboured was a joke to her, she did not at all relish the fact that the propriétaire of the pension shared that misapprehension. With her ' café complet ' in the morning her bill appeared, and the chambermaid announced that Madame required her room that day. Even Hilary's elementary knowledge of the French language was sufficient to understand what the maid said; and her intelligence was quite equal to the task of translating the underlying inference to the perfectly polite message. No, this was by no means amusing. Hilary was conscious of a very definite anger. But it was useless to enter into any argument with Madame. Better accept the message at its face value—Madame required the room for a friend who

had unexpectedly arrived. Hilary packed up her things, went out to get her déjeuner, and then moved to the Hôtel Anglais.

It would probably be a good deal more expensive here than at the pension, but Hilary did not feel inclined to risk the indignity of being requested to leave a second 'family' establishment. No hotel would be likely to get rid of a guest because she kept late hours at the Casino. Ridiculous of that prim little woman up at the pension to behave in such a fashion!

Although she told herself that the episode was too trivial and absurd to be taken seriously, Hilary still couldn't help feeling angry and upset. She wouldn't unpack just yet. She'd go for a walk, and then after a cup of tea at one of the English tea-rooms, she'd go down to the Casino. Somehow the thought of the Casino now brought to her a feeling of disturbance—she did not dwell upon it with any pleasure. She'd lost a good deal the night before, and after settling her account at the pension, her financial position did not appear too brilliant. What a fool she'd been not to stop playing when she was nearly a hundred and twenty pounds to the good! Now, she had less than four thousand francs in all—not much over thirty pounds. One thousand francs would be enough, if she travelled very cheaply, to take her back to London. In an inner compartment of her bag she placed one of her thousand-franc notes. This, at least, she wouldn't touch, so that even if she lost everything else, she'd still have enough to get her home. To be stranded penniless out here would be a very ghastly contingency. She certainly wouldn't risk that. Surely, with the balance of her capital, she must be able to win back what she'd lost! Of course she would. And she resolved now that she wouldn't be grasping. When she reached a hundred pounds, she'd leave the tables and return no more.

Yet, even after settling this in her own mind, she was by no means happy. She had turned her back on the Casino, and walked along the Côte des Basques. The big

waves thundered in at the foot of the cliffs below her, and far away, blue in the afternoon haze, dreamed the Pyrenees. Somewhere beyond those mountains Roger had gone. They looked so peaceful—so serene and still in the late afternoon sunshine! Why couldn't she feel like that? Why was she so restless, so unhappy? Was she missing Roger—lonely without him? Yes, she was lonely, and she did miss his companionship, but her unhappiness lay deeper than that. Suddenly she realised that her wretchedness had its origin within herself. It was a conflict. She was dissatisfied with the life she had been leading—hating herself at times. Why? Gina, and girls like Gina, were never bothered with these conflicts. They had no scruples. Scruples! What were they? Merely the artificial restraints imposed upon her in childhood. Absurd conventions. Why couldn't one just go one's own way, and not care two pins about anyone else? Or about one's own self-respect? Gina didn't care.

Impatiently Hilary dismissed disquieting thoughts. Of course she wasn't quite like Gina. If she once got free of debt, and into a really nice theatrical engagement, with the nice sort of people she had met at first, all would be well.

That wasn't possible, however, unless she could raise a little ready money.

She turned suddenly, and walked swiftly back along the way that she had come. Then, leaving the sea front by the Rue Gambetta, she passed quickly through the town, and so came to the Casino. She would play once more, and if she lost again, she would leave Biarritz next day.

Larrialde was already in the Baccarat Room, although play had not yet started. He moved across to speak to her as soon as she entered.

"If you care to sit here, I've reserved a place for you," he said.

Hilary had meant to play at the table where the stakes were lower. Now she changed her mind. After all, why

not sit here? The bigger game was more exciting, and one stood the chance of winning more. Of losing more also! No, not if one were careful.

"I'm going to play a very cautious game to-day," she remarked to Pierre, as she seated herself.

"A gambler—and cautious? It doesn't go together, does it?"

"I'm not a gambler—not really. Only just for a few days while I'm here."

"And then?"

"Oh, then, I'll go back to London—to look for work."

"What work?"

"I'm on the stage."

"Ah! An actress."

"Yes."

The game commenced. Hilary began by winning. A few minutes later she called: "Banco!" and lost. "Banco suivi!" She claimed the right to the following bank to recoup herself. This time she won. Now she punted steadily and successfully for a little while, and when her turn came to take the bank, she won three times. Then she passed it. Just in time. Baccarat for the next banker!

That was all right! She was going to have a lucky evening.

By ten o'clock, she knew from the pile of money and plaques before her, that she must have won a great deal more than the hundred pounds she had set herself to win. She might stop now. But it was so early. She'd play just for an hour longer. One couldn't lose much in an hour.

Couldn't one?

Things began to go badly, and as Hilary saw her money disappearing, she suddenly lost her head. She put up too much money on her own bank, lost it, and then began punting rather wildly. She was plunging now—playing recklessly—forgetting her caution.

"Banco!" Was that her own voice speaking? Why

had she said that? Was she crazy? It was a big bank. If she failed to win, had she enough to pay?

Panic seized her. Could everyone at the table see that her hands were shaking as she picked up the cards?

"Deux."

Yes, she must draw another card to try and reach a number nearer nine. "Carte!"

The dealer passed it face upwards. It was the eight of clubs!

"Baccarat," said the croupier.

All in the game! What did it matter to the croupier who won, or who lost? Someone was a loser on every hand.

They were waiting for Hilary to pay. She pushed forward the pile of money in front of her. It was short by a thousand francs. Eight hundred in her bag! Still two hundred short. Thank heaven she had that thousand-franc note stored away in an inner compartment of her bag. She'd have to break into that. But what did it matter as long as she was able to pay—not shamed before all these staring, waiting people.

Could she never get it out? It seemed an eternity to her, while she fumbled for the note. Ah! Here it was.

"I want change."

"I'll change it for you," said Larrialde. "How much?"

"A thousand." She unfolded the note.

It was for a hundred francs!

For a moment she stared at it blankly. Her heart seemed to have stopped beating. How had this happened? Fool! Fool! It wasn't the first time she had made this mistake—mixed up the thousand, and the hundred-franc notes.

Everyone was staring at her. The croupier was still waiting. Before them all she must be disgraced—stamped as a defaulter.

She turned to Larrialde, and laughed. Would that ghastly attempt at indifference deceive anyone? Yes, it

sounded natural enough; and though her heart was pounding like a sledge-hammer within her breast, still her voice was reasonably steady.

"How silly of me. I didn't put the thousand-franc note in my purse after all. Lend me a hundred, will you? I'll have to write a cheque."

"Of course." He added another note to hers, threw them both across to the croupier, and the game went on.

Hilary rose, and made her way to a writing-table at the side of the room. She sat down in a chair, and stared rather blindly before her. What was she to do? She had no cheque-book. Had now, not one penny in the world. And in another few minutes it would be apparent to everyone that she was destitute. She could not go back to the tables. Could not even return the hundred francs to Larrialde.

She must pretend to write something. Pretend to be busy searching for her cheque-book. She mustn't sit there stupidly staring, doing nothing!

Someone had left a copy of the *Continental Daily Mail* on the writing-table. She moved it as though to make room for her filling in of a cheque form. She went through the pantomime of searching in her bag for a non-existent cheque-book. She'd never be able to repay Feltman now! Well, that didn't matter. Nothing mattered except this present shame—this frightful humiliation. How to avoid that?

Feltman!

There on the printed page of the *Daily Mail* she saw his name. His name! What? Feltman dead! *Murdered!*

Suddenly Hilary felt her flesh creep. It was uncanny seeing his name like this, just as she had thought of him. When was he murdered? It wasn't the first announcement of the murder. That was old news. Ten days old.

Ten days! Then he must have been murdered just after she left. Yes, the body had been found that after-

noon. As she was steaming down the Thames, past tugs and barges, Feltman had been found lying in his flat, shot dead with his own revolver. Shot by someone hours before.

The police had good reason to believe some light might be shed upon the crime by a mysterious woman.

Hilary suddenly remembered Gina's voice on the telephone.

But it wasn't Gina they were looking for. The name of Hilary Ware wasn't mentioned, but the police were busy searching for the girl whom the night-porter had seen enter Feltman's flat. The girl to whom the porter had said: " Taxi, Miss? " And who, looking, as he said, " rather scared," had run quickly past him out into the night.

Why hadn't the porter found the body earlier? The door was open. Hilary hadn't closed it.

Yet someone had, it seemed. Someone who must have been in the flat after she left it; for no mention was made of any open door. Feltman's man had come next day, and entered the flat with his duplicate key. It was all there in the news columns. 'The Feltman Murder Mystery.' All there, as it must have been for the last ten days. And Hilary had made a boast of never looking at the papers!

" Banco avec la table. Banco seul."

Hilary was sitting very still, staring at the newspaper. About her were all the sounds of the Baccarat Room—the monotonous calling of the croupiers' voices. She had come to this table to gain time—to pretend to write a cheque. She rose, and walking towards one of the open French windows, she passed out on to the terrace.

It was as warm and still as it had been the previous night. The sky was as clear. In the moonlight one saw the loom of the big hotels. From far away came the flash of the lighthouse. Everything was as it had been. Everything save Hilary. She alone was changed; or rather her world was changed—it lay in ruins.

She moved swiftly across to the balustrade. No one in the lighted room behind her could see her now. She faced the ocean here; could see the moon among the stars high over the dark promontory of the Atalaye; the white line of the foaming breakers on the beach below her.

No one was in sight. She was here alone with the sea, and the still night, and the steady, rhythmic flash of the lighthouse. What was she to do? The sea! That was one way of escape. Had she courage enough to walk down to meet those big white breakers; to swim beyond them far out—so far that her strength would be spent, and she would be unable to return? No, she was afraid. Too great a coward for that. It wasn't only fear of death she felt, but petty, childish fears. Fears of the things she'd meet there in the dark water. Slimy fish swimming past her. Huge jelly fish, flabby against her flesh, touching her. Oh! she was a fool! An abject fool to be afraid of such trivial things. And yet she knew she couldn't take that way of escape.

What other way remained? How could she return to the hotel? She had no money to pay her bill. No money. Not a franc. Not a sou. And she must escape somewhere. Must hide from the police until the real murderer of Feltman was discovered. She'd run away from Feltman himself—hidden on that Bordeaux boat —and now, even though dead, he had the power to force her into flight.

It wasn't very likely the police would find her here. She'd travelled under Gina's name; and yet she would be safer away from Biarritz—lost in some lonely mountain village. She must go away to-night. Away? Where was she to go? Where could she go, with not a penny to help her on her way?

Suddenly she was aware that she was not alone. Pierre Larrialde stood beside her.

"You and I seem the only lovers of fresh air. To-night again we've got the terrace to ourselves."

"Yes."

He moved nearer to her, and looked down into her face. Still in his eyes was that little teasing smile. But it wasn't an unkind smile. "What's the matter?" he said. "Lonely?"

She shook her head. "No. At least . . . yes, of course I'm lonely. Most of us are, aren't we? But it's not that."

"Money?"

She nodded.

"To worry over money is to worry over nothing."

She laughed, sharply and bitterly. "How easily that's said by someone who's never known what it is to be . . . to be even hard-up."

"Well, are money troubles your only ones?"

She turned and faced him. "I can't return the money I borrowed from you. I haven't a penny in the world. I haven't anywhere to go to-night."

He paused a moment. "I have a home—simple, but quite comfortable. If you wish it you can make it yours until you're tired of it . . . and me."

Hilary remained quite still, looking out over the sea. "And when you're tired . . . of me?" she said slowly.

"I'm not a brute, and I'm not ungrateful. We'd come to some arrangement then. A fair and just arrangement."

From the lighthouse came the long, steady beam. It swung round—shone out to sea—was hidden from them. Ships far out would see it; the warning, guiding light. Danger too near! Keep out! You're safe now. I'm showing you the way.

Why did that light make her think of Edith Cavell? The statue near St. Martin's Church? Steadfastness. Ah, that was what Hilary Ware had lacked always. No sticking power. No pluck to fight difficulties. Always taking the easiest way.

Mother . . . no . . . you shan't ever know. I wouldn't hurt you so much. Poor little mother!

She turned to Larrialde. "When can we go?"

"We'll go now."

"In your car?"

"Yes." Suddenly he took her by her two wrists, and looked down into her eyes. "Why are you crying?"

She faced him with her head thrown back. "Crying? Why should I cry?" She gave a hard little laugh. "My luggage—can we call for that?"

"Will it go on the car?"

"Oh, yes, easily. It's at the Anglais."

"Not the pension?"

"No, I was asked to leave this morning." She hesitated for a moment, and then she went on: "I haven't any money—to pay my bill at the hotel. I must pay something."

"I'll settle that. Come along."

"Must we go through the Baccarat Room again?"

"It's the only way out."

She said no more, but walked beside him back through the French windows into the glare and the noise of that red-carpeted, plush-curtained 'Salle de Baccarat.'

"Rien ne vas plus. C'est fini."

The double doors swung to behind them. Together they walked down the corridor.

CHAPTER X

THEY had left Biarritz behind them, and now the smell of hay and honeysuckle came to them through the open windows of the car, as they passed along tree-shadowed roads. How still and lovely was the warm moonlight night! Why think of past or future? Hilary would not, and Larrialde apparently did not. He chatted unconcernedly as they drove along. They might have been merely polite acquaintances.

Polite acquaintances! With a sudden pang Hilary thought of Roger's question: "Have you a dear acquaintance?"

No, never now, would she have one. Never now, would she know respect, and tenderness, and honest love. That was what the phrase had seemed to mean to her. Sentimentality of course. Sentimentality was what one had to avoid like the plague. Well, she was done with sentiment.

They passed two men in uniform stationed in the shadows of the trees. "Douaniers," said Larrialde. "Watching for smugglers."

"Smugglers?"

"Oh, plenty of smuggling is done here. We're not far from the Spanish frontier, you know. Don't you remember Ramuntcho was a smuggler?"

"Ramuntcho?"

"In Loti's 'Tale of the Pyrenees.' You haven't read it? Perhaps you're not interested in the Basque people."

"I don't know much about them. I saw the Musée Basque at Bayonne. That interested me."

"That's the way to Bayonne. As straight as you can go."

He pointed left, along a wide, plane-tree bordered road. "My place is about an equal distance from Biarritz and Bayonne. I'm ten minutes' walk from the village of Arvray. A fine old church there. Nearly three hundred years old. Have you visited any Basque churches?"

"No."

"They have oak galleries in which the men are made to sit. The women sit below in the nave. My home is the old farm that has belonged to the family for generations. That's why I like it. There's enough of the Basque in me for that. They love their homes, and I'm the last of the Larrialdes."

"The last?"

"My three brothers were all killed in the war. I was at school in England then, and my grandfather was living here. He'd had the whole place done up years before; the stable underneath made into living-rooms, and hot and cold water in every bedroom. That's the 'Americain's' idea of opulence. Nothing can be grander than a white basin with a plug, and hot and cold taps."

"What do you mean—Americains?"

"It's what they call the Basques who make money in South America, and come back again to their own little native villages to cut a dash. My grandfather was 'Americain.'"

"Are you one too?"

"I?" He shrugged. "Basque peasant stock with four years at an English public school. Paris afterwards. Post-war Paris. Money to burn, and no work to do. What does that make of me? I've gained experience, let's say—that's all. Don't expect too much of the idle rich." He smiled down at her. "Here we are. Behold the entrance to the family estate!"

The lane up which they had come was on a gently rising ridge; on the right was a walled orchard, and to the left the country fell away in long fields, dipping to valleys, and rising again in undulating slopes. Clumps of trees here and there, sheltered little farmhouses, and far away one could discern the dim shapes of the Pyrenees against the stars.

They had stopped at the closed gates of a tree-bordered drive, and Larrialde was getting out to open them.

"I can drive the car through if you like," said Hilary.

"You drive?"

"Yes. The first car I drove was Citroën too. An old model. Perhaps you'd rather I didn't try my hand at driving now."

"Please do." He flung the gates wide, and Hilary drove the car through.

"You've driven in England?" said Pierre, as he got back into the driver's seat.

"Yes."

"Your own car?"

"No, sometimes on tour we hired a car. But I learnt to drive in Australia."

"So you've been there, also?"

"I was born there."

The car was moving along the drive through a garden, which even in the moonlight one saw was beautiful. The scent of the roses from the pergolas, flanking the tennis lawn, came to them, mingled with the scent of hay from the fields beyond. In the moonlight the white-washed farmhouse, with its green-shuttered, unlighted windows, and wide, creeper-covered balcony, looked austere and pure. Why did it make Hilary think of a lovely white nun? She couldn't tell. The simple lines of the old two-storied house seemed instinct with a serene and kindly dignity. Oaks and beeches cast long shadows across the lawn; and near at hand a fig tree spread its broad leaves against the stars. Crickets sang somewhere

in the grass; down in the valley to the left, where a little stream was lost in reeds, the frogs were croaking; and far away, on some distant farm, a dog barked. Those were the only sounds of the summer night, until a tiny breeze woke, and stirred the oaks and beeches, the fig tree and the roses.

Larrialde had stopped the car. "I must take your baggage in myself," he said. "My garçon and his wife sleep over the garage at the back. I never wake them."

"Don't they hear you come home in the car?"

"They say they don't. I offered them another room —there are plenty empty in the house—but they wouldn't take it." He was unloading her cases from the car. "I have no other resident staff. I told you not to expect grandeur. A village woman comes every morning to act as chambermaid, and her husband helps in the garden. I've no lady's maid to offer you."

Hilary stooped to take up one of her suitcases. He took it from her hand, and replaced it on the gravel of the drive. "I would prefer you didn't do that. I'll bring them all in, in a moment."

She made no reply. Now that they were here—arrived at their journey's end—she seemed incapable of speech; and she wouldn't let herself think—she wouldn't!

Larrialde had swung open the big oak door, and switched on the electric light within. Here was a wide hall-room, all green and gold, with painted flower panels. It was as though one entered suddenly a lovely sun-filled garden—furnished and roofed and walled.

"My ancestors kept farm carts, and cows and oxen here," he said. "They brought the outside world in under the roof to live with them. I bring it in too, in a different way. Wait here, while I put away the car, will you?"

In a few moments he was back and carrying in her baggage. A big flight of oak stairs led up out of the garden-room to the floor above.

"This way." He walked up the stairs, and Hilary

followed. On the landing above, on a polished table, were rolls and butter, chicken, and fruit.

"What would you like?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Nothing?"

She shook her head. In her white face, her eyes were big and strained.

He said no more, but made his way across the landing. "Here's your room."

Hilary saw a comfortably furnished bedroom, with long French windows leading out on to the balcony.

"Regard the basin—the summit of my grandfather's ambition. No, perhaps not quite the summit. Your bathroom there"—he pointed to an inner door—"represents the topmost crest." Still Hilary was silent. What could she say? What comment could she make? An open doorway on the left showed yet another room. Before he passed through into it, she knew it must be Larrialde's. He had closed the door, but it was not latched. Within the room she heard him moving.

She crossed to the window, and stood there looking out over the shadowed lawn, beyond the pergola, to the sweep of country dropping below the ridge—wooded valley and grassed hillside—hazy in the moonlight, stretching away, away to the foothills of the Pyrenees. But she saw nothing of that outer world. Her brain was numb with misery. Why had she come? What madness had possessed her? She put her hands over her face, and stood quite still, struggling for self-control—struggling to think. Wasn't there yet time to escape? To escape, where? Out into the night? Time was passing. Soon it would be too late. Where could she go? What could she do?

A sudden hurried movement from Larrialde's room startled her. What was that? Was he coming in here? She sprang towards the communicating door. In this moment of panic, she was conscious of only one thought. She must pull it to—lock it against him.

But as she reached the door, she heard the staggering step again, and then a queer choking cough. Something had happened. She knew that in a flash—knew it before she had flung the door wide open, and saw him standing there, gripping the basin with both hands, blood pouring from his lips.

In another second she was beside him—one arm round him, the other holding a towel to wipe his lips.

It was over now, the flow of blood had ceased. Pierre's face was very white and the sweat stood out on it, but he still smiled.

"Poor Grandfather," he muttered huskily. "His basins were never meant for that."

"Don't speak!" said Hilary, her voice sharp with fear. No longer for herself was the fear, pity had gripped her heart. "Lean on me. Can you manage to walk to the bed? No, don't answer, come!"

He nodded, and moved beside her, walking rather unsteadily. He was two or three inches taller than she, but beneath the silk dressing-gown she could feel how thin he was. Her arm held him. "Poor child, I'm sorry," he whispered.

"Don't talk!" she returned sharply.

He raised his eyebrows smilingly, as though in a mock protest at her tone, but he obeyed; and in another moment he had reached the bed. Hilary settled the pillows, pulled up the coverlet and placed a towel beneath his cheek.

"Don't move!" she said. "I know where your servants sleep. Over the garage. I'm going to wake them—to send for the doctor."

He was too weak to protest. He lay quite still with closed eyes, and for a moment Hilary was frightened at his pallor. But he opened his eyes, smiled at her, and gave a little reassuring nod.

She left him then, and passed swiftly over the landing, down the stairs, and through the garden room. The light was still burning here. Round the corner of the house she

flew, following the track of the car. There was the garage, with an outside stairway leading to an upper room. She ran up the stairs and knocked sharply at a closed door. There was no reply—unless the sound of snoring might be taken as response. She slipped off a shoe, and hammered loudly with it on the panels of the door. At last they heard! They made some exclamation. In French, of course, and she was talking English. "Come quickly," she was saying. "Your master is very ill." How could one say that in French: "Venez vite. Votre maître est très malade." Was that right? It was the best she could do anyhow. She called this out, again and again, through the closed door. There were shuffling footsteps within the room: the sound of a man's voice—surly and harsh—and a woman's quick and sharp, answering him. At last the door was thrown open, and in the moonlight, Hilary saw a man's face peering at her—the sort of face for which the surly voice had partially prepared her. A woman was in the background, looking over his shoulder. A woman with grey wisps of hair falling over a lined, but not unkindly face. She was holding some garment round her, clutching it at the throat.

How to explain the situation to these two? They spoke no English, and Hilary's French was very limited. How in the first place, explain herself? her presence here? They had been roused, long after midnight, by a strange Englishwoman shouting that their master was ill.

Yet, at last they understood, that the matter was urgent; and the woman came to give Hilary some ice out of the ice chest. What with a word or two, and signs, she had made some sort of conversation between them possible. The doctor? The doctor was at Bayonne. Dr. Dibart. Telephone? Yes, there was a telephone here, but not at night. No, it was not to be done. Everyone slept, only during the day could one telephone.

Then, said Hilary to the man, he must take the car, must fetch the doctor. But at this he shook his head very decidedly.

Hilary had the ice now, and she ran back upstairs, and into Pierre's room. He looked up at her, and whispered again. "Poor child . . ."

"Please, please! I know you ought not to talk." She slipped a small piece of ice between his lips. She knew what she must do. If the garçon wasn't capable of driving the car—she was. He could accompany her to show her the way. She'd leave the woman up here in the sick-room, and set off at once.

But when she returned to the kitchen, she found that things were not quite so easily arranged. The man obstinately refused to set foot in the car. Probably he distrusted Hilary's skill as a driver. It was as useless for her to command as to entreat. With the small amount of French at her disposal, both orders and entreaties resolved themselves into a good deal of dumb show.

At last she realised that any further argument was useless, and merely waste of valuable time. She must go alone. Could she find the way? She remembered the turning—at least, she thought she could find it, which Larrialde had told her was the road to Bayonne. Plane trees bordered it. That would make it easy to recognise. And the car? Would she be able to manage that? It was different in small details to John's, but she'd already handled the gears. Driving from the left side would be awkward for the first time, and she must remember to keep to the right if she met any other vehicles. But it wasn't very likely there would be much on the roads to-night. Anyhow, she must just put her trust in Providence, and set out at once.

She succeeded in getting the man to open the entrance gates for her. That, at least, was something; and soon she was speeding down the road along which less than an hour ago she had come. The moon was lower now, but still the honeysuckle from the hedges, and the freshly cut hay in the fields, scented the air. Which was the Bayonne road? No, not that. Suddenly two figures appeared in the moonlight directly in front of her. They were

signalling to her to stop. She must perforce slacken speed, or she would run them down. Douaniers—customs officers! They surely couldn't take her for a smuggler! How, with so little French, could she explain her mission?

Perhaps her bare head and ruffled hair, her white anxious-eyed face, her prettiness, and her youth, did more to convince them of her innocence—that she was not engaged in any unlawful enterprise—than her few French words—her stumbling sentences, in which, " Dr. Dibart, Bayonne "; and " Un homme très malade "; made endless repetition.

They let her go at last; but she had been delayed, and frightened, and now became uncertain of her way. Had she missed that plane-tree bordered road? Perhaps the last turning that she took was wrong! Impossible to swing the car round in this narrow lane. She must go on, and find a cross-road.

Another delay. Suppose Larrialde were to die while she was absent! A sense that was almost panic seized her as she took the car back, looking first to one side, and then to the other. Ah! there, that must be the Bayonne road! She sped along it, until in the distance she saw faintly—ethereal and dreamlike—in the moonlight above the tree-tops the twin spires of the Cathedral.

But having reached Bayonne, another difficulty presented itself. How was she to find Dr. Dibart's house? It was in the rue Victor Hugo, so she had been told, but she did not know the number. She saw herself ringing door-bells, waking people, alarming the neighbourhood in her search; and with that thought back to her memory came the phrase : ' Sonnette de nuit.' Where had she seen that? Of course! That day with Roger, at lunch in the rue Victor Hugo! There was a doctor's house opposite to them then. In all probability that would be Dr. Dibart's.

Her surmise proved to be correct. She found the house easily enough, rang the bell and waited. The doctor answered from an upper window, and soon descended to

the courtyard to find out what she wanted. With joy, Hilary discovered that he could speak English fairly well. Yes, he attended M'sieur Larrialde—had known his father. Hæmorrhage? Ah! that was bad! He would come in his own car at once.

CHAPTER XI

TWO hours later, Hilary sitting at her long French window, watched the Pyrenees grow amethyst and lilac against a primrose sky; heard the birds chattering in the oaks and beeches across the dewy lawn; and saw the first rays of the red-gold morning sun light up the mountain peaks.

The doctor had been and gone again; and now the patient was sleeping. But Hilary hadn't slept—hadn't yet undressed. She had lived years in this one night; and though heavy-eyed and weary, she still was wide awake.

No need for great alarm, the doctor told her. A hæmorrhage was not always so dangerous. This was a spot on the lung. It would most likely clear up now. Rest and quiet, that was what was needed. For three days absolute quiet and for at least a fortnight he must stay in bed.

The doctor asked no questions as to her presence here; and the Frenchwoman, the cook-housekeeper, seemed to accept her as an English nurse. She was not to nurse the patient, however, that was made very clear to her. The doctor was sending over a male attendant. It was Larrialde's own wish.

And she herself, what should she do? What position did she occupy, here in this old Basque farmhouse? She didn't know. She only knew that it was the sole refuge left to her. Without it she would lack both food and shelter. Without it she would be pried upon, inquiries made. 'Why, you're the girl they're looking for! The girl who was at Feltman's flat that night!'

Hilary stood up. She wouldn't think of that. It was an utterly unlikely—an almost impossible—contingency, that Scotland Yard would ever find her here, so far away from England. The mystery of Feltman's death couldn't remain a mystery for ever; and when that mystery was solved, no one would have the slightest wish to find the girl to whom the night porter had spoken, the girl who had run past him, ' looking rather scared.'

No, she wasn't sleepy, but she was aching in every limb. She must at least relax her weary muscles. So she lay down just as she was, and closed her eyes. And when she opened them again, the sun was no longer shining in at the balcony. It was high over the roof. She must have slept for hours.

The whole house was very quiet. From the garden came the sound of birds, and the cicadas in the hot sunlight. Hilary tiptoed over the landing, down the stairs, and through a wide-open side door, on to a grassed terrace. Roses scented the warm air, and in the lane beyond the entrance gates, the old stone wall of the orchard was hot in the sun.

Now, she was out of the lane, and in a wider road—a road which sloped gently upwards towards the south. There were pink briar roses in the hedges amongst the honeysuckle; forget-me-nots and yellow irises in the damp watercourses, where pines, oaks and walnuts from the thicket cast their shade. An old man in sabots, with a sack over his shoulder, and walking with a thick stave, gave her: " Bonjour "—nodding his grey head under its jaunty beret; and the sound of a cow-bell came to her from far away.

Soon she had gained the top of the hill. There lay the mountains in the distance; the stream in the valley bordered by willows; haycocks on the grassy slopes; and old farmhouses dotted here and there amongst clumps of trees—willows, oaks and poplars. Nearer at hand was the village. The square-towered church with dark cyprus spires about it. The pelota court; the whitewashed

houses with their green and blue shutters; and the arbour of plane trees, cut like a pergola of terraced vines, casting a thick bar of shadow before the open door of the inn.

From the churchyard came the sound of masons' hammers. They were setting up a new stone monument amongst the old ones, whose broken crosses and copings were draped and garlanded with a wild riot of coloured roses. Children, with high, shrill laughter, darted here and there amongst the tombs and cypresses, frightening the village hens into an astonished cackle, and a little whir of wings.

No one was in the church when Hilary entered and sat down. It was very cool and still. For nearly three hundred years, she thought, Basque men and women have sat here. The men up in those two-tiered, dark oak galleries, the women in these little chairs, here on the stone floor of the church. They've brought their sorrows, and laid them at the feet of the gold and blue Virgin there on her altar amongst the roses. Have they found comfort?

Restlessly the girl rose, and moved round the church. The small shrines, the rather pathetic-looking pictures and figures of saints, decorated with little bunches of flowers from the village gardens, meant nothing to her. She lacked the faith of these simple peasants. Nothing here could ease her pain.

Out in the sunshine again she walked on. Where was she going? She didn't know. A woman driving two fawn-coloured oxen in a little cart—solid-wheeled like a Roman chariot—passed her, and then a man on foot approached. She saw him in the distance, but paid no attention to him until he was close at hand. Then she looked up. Oh, this was a miracle! A greater miracle surely than any that had ever come to pass in answer to the peasants' prayers in that old village church. With a little gasping, joyful cry of recognition, she ran swiftly forward. "Roger!"

He stopped dead, and regarded her in amazement.

" Roger! What on earth are you doing here? "

" What are you? "

" Oh! . . . I? . . . Tell me first about yourself? "

They moved together towards the shade of a beech tree beside the road. Hilary was half laughing, and half crying, in her excitement. " I thought you were in Spain."

" Yes, I went as far as Pamplona, but I wanted to have a look at the villages on this side of the frontier, so I came back. I'm staying about three miles away at a little place on the Nive. I was coming into Biarritz to-morrow to see you—to find out your plans."

Her plans! What were they?

" When are you going back? "

" I don't know. Roger—something's happened." She must tell him everything.

He'd cut short his tour; come back to see her—not to see the villages on this side of the frontier—that she knew. But what she didn't know was whether his affection would be strong enough to stand the shock of her story. She was suspected—practically accused, though not openly—of murder. Roger would only have her word for it that she was innocent—that she knew nothing of the crime—but she felt sure he would believe she was speaking the truth. Yet, what would he say to her adventure of the previous night? Should she tell him? She must. In Roger lay her only hope of salvation.

" Roger, I told you about that man—the man I ran away from in London. His name was Feltman."

" Feltman . . . Feltman! Where have I heard that name, lately? "

" The Feltman murder mystery."

" Good God! Yes."

" I was with him the night before he was—was murdered. The police—the English police—are looking for me."

He could only stare at her in a sort of dumb horror;

and after a moment she went on: "I didn't know until last night that he'd been . . . killed."

"But . . . but it's been in the paper—the *Daily Mail*—every day."

"I know! I never saw the papers. Don't you remember?"

"But . . . I heard it on the wireless—that first night in the Channel. I told you."

"No, you didn't."

"About some rich man being murdered in a West End flat."

"You never said his name. I never connected that with Feltman. Never thought of it again until this moment."

"What's going to happen?"

"I don't know. But they must find the real murderer soon, and then they won't want me. And after all, it would be ages before they got on my track here. No one on board except you called me anything but Miss Gould. Nobody looked at my passport at Bordeaux, and you wouldn't be likely to tell anyone about me."

"No, but—I have told my sisters."

"Told them what?"

"That you were on the boat. They liked you in 'Outward Bound.' I mentioned you in my letters."

"Oh! Why did you do that?" she cried sharply.

Her tone stung Roger to a sudden irritation. "How was I to know that you wanted to hide?"

She paused a minute before replying. Roger and she mustn't get annoyed with one another. This wasn't the time for petty arguments. "I didn't know it myself then," she said, a little sadly. "At least, I didn't know it was so necessary."

"You showed your passport at the hotel at Bordeaux, and the day we took our tickets at the Casino."

"Yes, but no one would be looking for me in Bordeaux, if they didn't know I travelled on that boat."

"My sisters aren't likely to mention you, anyhow."

" No, I suppose they aren't. And after all, perhaps the police haven't yet discovered the identity of . . . of the girl who was with Feltman that night."

" Then no harm's done."

" I suppose not."

There was a silence between them. Roger was still trying to bring his mind into line with this new aspect of the girl he believed he knew, but there was still a further aspect to be realised.

" When I saw it in the paper—suddenly, last night in the Baccarat Room . . ."

" The Baccarat Room! What were you doing there? "

" What do you usually do in the Baccarat Room? '" she asked, again with a little sharp edge to her voice, which the next moment she regretted, for she saw Roger's face harden. " Oh, Roger, be patient with me for a little while. I'm terribly tired. I've been through so much."

" Well? "

" I'd lost all my money gambling. Oh, I know it sounds awful, but I went crazy, I think. Didn't realise it was such a big bank, and I thought I had a thousand-franc note in my bag, and when I got it out it was only a hundred . . ."

" Well? "

Oh, why would he keep on saying, ' Well,' like that? It sounded as though he were a judge, listening to a prisoner.

" I'd lost all my money. I'd had to borrow from Pierre Larrialde."

" Larrialde—that Frenchman at the Casino? "

" He isn't French. He's Basque. Don't you remember the English Consul told you about him? "

" Well? "

Hilary tried to shut her ears to the sound of that ' Well.' " I borrowed from him—but only to pay for banco at the table, and I hadn't anything to pay for my hotel bill, and I was terrified at what I'd seen in the paper about Feltman, and I wanted to run away somewhere and

hide—and when he said—when he asked . . ." She stopped.

" Asked what? "

" Said his house was here, and I . . ."

" And you could live with him? "

Hilary did not reply, and Roger caught her by the wrist. " You came out here with him last night," he said.

" Yes." Her voice was only a whisper.

Roger dropped her hand, and Hilary knew the judge had passed sentence. She had wanted to cure his heart-ache. Well, his heart would never ache for her again. She knew that.

" You're all right, then, now? Not hard up, I mean? "

" Oh, no, I'm all right." Her voice sounded almost cheerful.

" Because—I haven't got much money—nothing like Larrialde—but I could manage something, if it were absolutely necessary."

" Oh, no, no," she said hurriedly. " It's not likely to be."

" Well, I'll be getting along. You're—you're living near here? "

She nodded.

" Good-bye, then."

" Good-bye. Oh! Roger, you were so good to me, I'll always be grateful to you. Try not to think of me too unkindly."

" Of course I won't. Good luck."

He walked on, and did not once look back.

Hilary stood quite still where he had left her in the shade of the beech tree. Across the road, in a walled enclosure, there were straggling fig trees, hot in the sun; and the wind came up from the sea, and stirred the grasses round her; the blue flax flower, the yellow clover, and the dandelions. The shivering grass was dancing gaily. She had played with that as a little girl in Sydney. A little girl! Oh, mother, mother! Why couldn't she

go back—back to that time—and wipe out all this dreadful pain?

There was no sound about her but a bird singing in the beech tree, and the sea-wind moving in the grass. Then from afar she heard voices. Nearer and nearer they came. The voices of children singing. Soon they swung into sight; a long line of them marching two and two, singing French songs at the tops of their voices—happy, hearty, laughing voices.

No, she wasn't crying. She could face them quite cheerfully. They smiled at her as they went by and the nurse in uniform and sabots, marching with them, gave her a little friendly nod. Did they believe in miracles, those children? Well, let them believe a little longer. Knowledge of the truth is too bitter for childish hearts to bear.

From the distance their voices still floated back to her; but by and by there was no sound to be heard, save the bird singing in the beech tree, and the wind moving in the grass.

CHAPTER XII

IT was after one o'clock when Hilary got back to the house, and it appeared that déjeuner had been ready for some time. It was set for ' Madame ' alone, in a room on the ground floor, with big windows looking over the grassy terrace at the side of the house. The sombreness of the room's oak beams and panelling was lightened by its bright cottage chintz; and books and pictures, and big bowls of flowers, gave it an air of homely comfort. Out on the terrace were formal little trees in green tubs, and coloured garden chairs.

Marie, the wife of Jean, the garçon, waited at table, and with some difficulty made Hilary understand that Larrialde was no worse and that the doctor would probably call again during the afternoon. There was something else Marie had to say about a room, but Hilary could not quite make out what she meant; and it was Dr. Dibart who explained it to her later. She had determined not to allow him to depart until she learned from him exactly how the patient was progressing; and so she waited in the garden, and when the doctor came out from the house, he found her standing beside his car.

Yes, the patient was going along quite well, but he was to be kept perfectly quiet for the next two days. The male nurse was installed in the room next to his, and Madame's things had been moved to another room—Marie would show her. It appeared that Larrialde had been anxious that the doctor himself should give Madame this message; and he hoped that she would not be

inconvenienced in any way by being put into a smaller room. Dr. Dibart had also been asked to inform her that she was to regard the house as her own—to give her orders. Marie could make her tea—English five o'clock —and dinner was at eight. Larrialde begged her to amuse herself as best she could to-day, and he hoped to see her to-morrow.

" But not until I see him, you must not," said the doctor. " After déjeuner, when I call." He questioned her as to the cause of the hæmorrhage. Had Larrialde been subjected to any strain, pulling anything, lifting any heavy weight?

Of course! Hilary remembered her two suitcases which Pierre had insisted upon carrying upstairs for her. So it was she who was responsible—indirectly, perhaps, but still responsible—for this attack. With a stricken face she told the doctor.

" You are only arrived last night? "

" Yes."

He asked no further questions as to that. He was a kind little man, and he was fond of Pierre—that was quite evident. But Larrialde! He made a gesture of impatience. He was so pig-headed and perverse, this young man. Why, when he ought to spend all his days, and nights too, in the open air, should he, like a fool, spend them in the Casino? Perhaps Madame would prevail upon him to have more sense in this direction in future.

With uplifted hat and a sweeping bow, the little doctor got into his car. He would see her on the following day about this hour.

Hilary went back to the house, and Marie showed her upstairs to her room. It was above the small salle à manger in which she had eaten her déjeuner, and looked out upon the side terrace. From this height one could see, beyond the shrubbery, the coast-line towards San Sebastian, and a glimpse of the western slopes of the Pyrenees. It was a comfortable, bright room, with two

others adjoining it; the three approached by a second staircase, not the one which she and Pierre had used on the preceding evening. These rooms seemed to be shut off from the front landing. Probably they had been nurseries, or servants' rooms, when Pierre's grandfather had remodelled and modernised the farmhouse.

Installed here, Hilary could encourage a feeling of remoteness from the rest of the household. She might feel herself merely an ordinary guest, who had accepted an invitation to spend a week or two in the country. She would not regard herself as anything else. She refused to contemplate any future in which she might be called upon to readjust this point of view.

And thus obstinately declining to face facts, she did at last succeed in dulling the torment of her thoughts. The afternoon passed somehow. She unpacked, found a book, wandered in the garden, and after dinner went immediately to her room. She was dazed with fatigue, both physical and mental, and she slept that night the deep sleep of a tired child.

CHAPTER XIII

ALICE MARSHALL shouted to her husband, who was putting up new wire-netting in one of the fowl runs. " I'm taking the eggs, and the cockerels, over to Peter's. Any message? "

" Tell him to come up this evening to play bridge. I can get hold of Handyside for a fourth."

" Peter won't give up his beloved Casino."

" Then tell him to go to the devil."

" I needn't tell him. He'll go without that."

Alice and Bob laughed. Alice, standing at the garage door, and Bob at the foot of the green, sunny slope, amongst the orderly rows of chicken-houses, and the innumerable pens of white leghorns, and Rhode Island Reds. Bob moved stiffly, but quite actively, along on his peg-leg. He no longer wore the more elaborate artificial one, which had been ' made to measure ' in 1917. On a peg-leg one could amble about the poultry farm quite comfortably; and if it didn't look so handsome as the ' fitted ' one, Alice, and the hens, and the few English, and the many French, neighbours didn't mind, so what did it matter, anyhow?

John Marshall, aged four, helped his mother to open up the garage. " When will Peter go? " he asked. " To-morrow? "

" Where? " Alice had already forgotten her remark about Peter. She was stowing the egg-boxes in the back of the car. Mrs. Stevens wanted an extra two dozen. She must remember to get benzine on the way in; call at the dressmaker's; to the market for fish. . . .

" Will he go undressed, or in his pyjamas? "

" I don't know what you're talking about," said Alice.

" Peter going to see the devil. He won't stay there, will he? I don't want him to stay."

Alice laughed. " When Dad says, ' Oh, go to the devil,' he's only joking. He means, ' Oh! get along with you,' that's all."

" But *you* said Peter was going."

" I was only in fun. Come on now, hop in. We'll call at Peter's on the way home."

" You don't want him to go to the devil, really, do you, not honest Injun? You love Peter, really and truly, don't you? "

" Well, I don't love him quite as much as I love you and Dad," returned Alice. " But I'm rather attached to him."

" I'm rather 'tached to him too," said John. " That's why I wouldn't like him to go to the devil, not to stay. I wouldn't mind if he'd come back and tell me all about the devil—if he's got horns and a tail."

" Who's been telling you such silly things? "

" Jacques. But Handy-Andy says there isn't one—not a devil at all. It's all 'magination, he says."

" Handy-Andy's quite right."

" He's making me a little cart with wheels."

" Handy-Andy spoils you."

" Oh, no, he doesn't, Mummy. He says he likes little boys. Why doesn't he got one, then? "

" He'd have to get a wife first."

" I 'spose that'd be a bit of a nuisance to him. They are sometimes, aren't they? "

Alice laughed. " I have heard of some that were."

" Well, I shall tell him to get the little boy and not go bothering about any old wife."

" Immoral child! " said Alice.

" What's that? "

" What? "

" An amoral child."

" A child who asks too many questions."

" Oh! Am I one? "

" Sometimes."

" But you love me just the same, don't you? "

" Oh, you're not a bad old stick."

They continued to converse in this strain most of the way into Biarritz, and most of the way out again; and were still chatting in the same sociable manner when they turned into the lane leading to the Larrialde homestead.

" There's a girl sitting in that chair," said John, as the car pulled up before the house.

" Where? " asked Alice.

" Just there." John pointed to a shady seat beside the rose-covered pergola.

" It must be Marie." But Alice knew as she said it that it wasn't. Marie had probably been attractive in her youth, but never as attractive as this girl. Golden-brown eyes and golden-brown hair, with a sort of ' flying nymph ' look. Alice wasn't quite sure what she meant by that phrase, but the girl wasn't just a pretty girl, she was ' different.' What was she doing here, alone with Peter? And who on earth was she? She wasn't a Frenchwoman, for when Mrs. Marshall hailed her in cheerful patois, she shook her head, " Je ne parle pas français."

English or American from the way in which she said that.

" Are you English? "

" Oh, yes. Are you? "

There seemed a queer note of eagerness in her manner. Why welcome another Englishwoman, if she were living here—unchaperoned and alone—with Larrialde?

How stupid. Why should she be alone? English friends of Peter's, no doubt. The mother would be dozing indoors somewhere. Peter hadn't said anything about expecting any friends when he'd lunched with them

three days ago. But probably it had slipped his memory. Alice introduced herself.

"My husband and I have a chicken farm near here. We supply Peter with eggs and poultry. Surely he hasn't gone off to the Casino yet? They don't start play till five-thirty."

"No. He's ill."

"Ill? Peter! You mean Pierre Larrialde?"

"Yes. The night before last—he had a hæmorrhage."

"What!"

"Dr. Dibart doesn't think it's so serious. A very small spot on the lung which he believes will clear up now."

"Oh, poor Peter. Is he well enough for visitors?"

"The doctor said not until to-morrow—but he's going on very satisfactorily, I believe."

"I suppose you've seen him to-day?"

Hilary shook her head. "No—not yet." She did not add that the doctor had told her she might go up this afternoon, and that coward-like she had not yet been near the patient. Not because she dreaded a sick-room, the sight of suffering—but because she dreaded meeting Larrialde again. If only she might never have to see him any more! What could they say to one another? How could they meet as ordinary acquaintances? At the moment of his seizure things had been different. She had had no time then to be self-conscious—to remember any personal relationship between them. She had to act, and to act quickly. But now that the emergency was over, the impersonal note would be difficult to sustain.

"Perhaps your mother—or whoever is here with you—has seen him?"

Hilary's eyes seemed to widen a trifle, and her face looked rather white, but she faced Alice quite bravely.

"Nobody's here with me," she said.

"Oh, you're his nurse?"

"No, only . . . a friend. I . . . came back with him from the Casino."

"Oh! . . ." Alice was a trifle non-plussed. "Really!

From the Casino?" Her repetition of the words sounded merely inane, but what comment was she supposed to make? The girl was still looking at her with those rather pitiful brown eyes; and Alice had a queer feeling that she would like to put out her hand, and stroke her head, and say: "It's all right. No one's going to hurt you." But, as she remarked to her husband later, people don't go about stroking other people's heads—perfect strangers' heads—and telling them not to be frightened. It isn't done. All she could do was to say cheerfully: "Well, give him my love—I'm Mrs. Marshall—and tell him that Bob and I will be over to see him as soon as he's fit to talk to friends."

"And give him my love, too," said John. "John's love. He knows me—John—and I'm rather 'tached to him. He's not a bad old stick."

Both Hilary and Alice laughed. "You're a little parrot!" said Alice. "Always repeating other people's words."

"No, Mummy. You didn't say it was Peter was a bad old stick. You said it was me. I said Peter."

"All right, we won't argue over it. You run along round to the kitchen and ask Marie to come and get the eggs and the chickens. Go quietly, in case Peter's asleep."

John tiptoed with immense precaution, along the grassed border towards the side terrace, and left Mrs. Marshall and Hilary alone together. Their mutual laughter over the small boy's remark had helped to dissipate the constraint between them.

"Is there anything one could do for Peter?" asked Alice, at last.

"I don't think so, at present. Dr. Dibart sent over a nurse, a Frenchman, but he—the doctor—says it's only rest and quiet that's needed."

"What's really needed is a little common sense on Peter's part," said Alice impatiently. "It's criminal the way he's trifling with his health. A man with a tendency

to lung trouble ought to be spending his life in the open air, instead of in the Baccarat Room. Perhaps you'll be able to influence him."

"I?" Hilary flashed her a quick, startled glance. "I haven't any influence with him."

"Surely . . ." Alice hesitated.

Well, it wasn't any of her business! "Perhaps this illness will give him a good old fright," she said viciously. "I hope so at any rate. Oh, here's Marie." She turned, smiling, to the elderly woman who was advancing towards them. John ran beside Marie, chattering eagerly in French. Alice laughed at Hilary's face of astonishment.

"Oh, John talks three languages," she said. "English, French, and Basque. That's where children score over grown-ups. I think John's French is better than his mother's."

Marie, however, seemed to understand Mrs. Marshall's conversation easily enough. It was quite evident that John and his mother were liked, not only by the master, but by the servants as well.

The egg boxes and the four trussed chickens were handed over to Marie, and in another few minutes Alice started up the car, and drove away.

"She's a pretty lady, isn't she, Mummy?" said John.

"Yes," said Alice, rather soberly. "I suppose that's just how she might be described."

"Don't you *like* her to be a pretty lady?"

Alice smiled down at her little son. "What makes you ask that?"

"Your voice sounded sort of sorry."

"Oh, you imagine things," she answered gaily.

But she knew that he hadn't imagined it. Her voice *had* sounded 'sort of sorry.'

CHAPTER XIV

HILARY went back to her chair, and picked up her book, but she didn't read. She was trying to make up her mind to go upstairs and see Larrialde. However difficult the visit might be it must be paid sometime. He was expecting her, she knew.

It was Marie who helped her eventually, by coming out to announce that the afternoon tea—Marie called it 'five o'clock'—was to be served by M'sieur's orders in M'sieur's room, that is if Madame had no objection. No, Madame had none. On the contrary—though she didn't tell Marie this—she was delighted to be provided with some perfectly reasonable and commonplace excuse for her visit to Larrialde. It would make their meeting easier, their conversation more natural.

But when she reached Larrialde's room, she realised that this interview, which she had dreaded, was not to be in the least difficult. Pierre was lying rather white, and straight, and still, upon his pillows, but in spite of this, he smiled at her quite cheerfully, and greeted her without the least trace of awkwardness.

"Ought you to talk?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, in moderation. I shan't shout or get excited."

"And you're really better?"

"I was never very bad—though I owe you an apology for frightening you so much."

"Don't let's talk about that," she said hurriedly.

"Oh, but we must talk about it just a little. I've got to thank you for getting the doctor. It was plucky, going alone on a strange road, driving a strange car."

"It wasn't at all," she answered. "I've often driven before, and it was up to me to do something. The doctor thinks that lifting my . . . my luggage, helped to bring on your attack. I'm terribly sorry about it." Any reference to her arrival here was difficult, but she had to make this apology. Now, without giving him time to speak she hurried on: "Are you allowed tea?"

"Yes, one cup Dibart allows. Does Marie make it as you like it? Very few Frenchwomen can make tea properly."

"It was very nice yesterday, and I'm sure it's the same to-day." She poured out a cup of tea and took it across to his bedside table.

"And does Marie do for you properly? See that you have everything you want?"

"Oh, yes, everything."

"I've told her to devote herself to you. To engage a third woman if necessary."

"Oh, I'm sure it isn't. Not for me at any rate."

"But having already given you so much trouble and annoyance, I want you to be well looked after now, and if you need money . . ."

"Oh, please . . ." said Hilary, flushing quickly. "Why should I want money? I've nothing to spend it on."

"You might like to spend a little for me at the Casino. I can order a car . . ."

"No, no." Hilary was suddenly very still and quiet. "I shall never go to the Casino again."

"How solemnly you say it—like a vow!"

She tried to answer his smile. "I didn't mean to be solemn, but—I don't ever want to play any more. I never will."

"You're self-denying. I shall go just as soon as that old fool Dibart allows me up."

"Why do you like it so much?"

He lifted his shoulders a fraction of an inch on the pillows, in an almost imperceptible shrug. "Who knows why certain things attract one, and others leave one cold? It's the same with people. 'I do not like thee, Dr. Fell.'"

"But if you aren't in need of money, to win more can't be so very exciting."

He gave her a little humorous, side-long glance. "One doesn't always win, you know. One loses—very frequently!"

"And does that give you great pleasure?"

"No, I can't say that it does."

"So if you've no need to win, and you don't care about losing, why play?"

"Ah, why? That's a hard question to answer. I suppose it's the thrill of hazard—chance. My life's been too easy. I come of a people who love adventure. Pirates, smugglers, fighters. These stupid lungs of mine and the twentieth century debar me from any of those innocent enjoyments, so I find some small excitement in the turn of a card."

"Mrs. Marshall called to-day. She sent you her love, and she said she hoped you'd be able to see her and her husband soon."

"I shall be delighted. They're good friends."

"John sent his love too. He said he was rather 'tached' to you."

"I'm very much 'tached' to John. He's a fine little kid."

"He also added that you weren't a bad old stick. His mother had just told him he wasn't."

They both laughed, and as with Mrs. Marshall and herself earlier in the afternoon, Hilary now found this mutual laughter helpful. A shared joke—however small it might be—seemed to create a more natural, friendly atmosphere.

"Mrs. Marshall means to scold you for going so

much to the Casino, when you ought to be in the open air."

He grinned cheerfully. "Mrs. Marshall shall be given the opportunity to scold very shortly. We'll ask her to tea."

"But her scolding won't make any difference?"

"Why should it? I'm not likely to alter my plan of life to anybody else's specification. I have to live it, not they."

"Then why encourage her to scold?"

"It pleases her, and it doesn't hurt me. Besides, I don't encourage her. I merely ask her to tea."

"Perhaps it's the same thing."

They smiled at one another, and after a few minutes Hilary rose. "I think you've talked quite enough for to-day," she said.

Yet when she left him, she was quite sorry to go. How absurd to have worried over this encounter! She had made a delightful new acquaintance: he was that and no more.

There was no reason whatever to think of him in any other relation to herself, but as a friend.

CHAPTER XV

BOB MARSHALL was down in the vegetable garden, cutting cabbages for the fowls, when Alice advanced towards him from the house. She carried an open letter in her hand. "Here's a note from Peter," she said. "Jean brought it over."

"How is he? Peter, I mean, not Jean."

"Getting on splendidly. He wants us to go to tea to-day. I told Jean to wait until I saw you."

"I'm all right for this afternoon, if you are. I'd like to see him."

"Yes . . . but . . ."

"But what?"

"Well, I don't know. I suppose that girl's still there."

"I hope so. I want to have a look at her."

"Bob! I'm ashamed of you."

"According to you, she's worth looking at."

"Yes, she is, but . . ."

"You're not afraid of my being led astray, are you?"

"No, I'm not very frightened of that."

"Well, if it isn't my morals that are likely to be corrupted by saying How-d'ye-do to her, is it yours, or John's?"

"Don't be absurd!"

"What's the trouble then?"

"You know as well as I do. It's not *right* of Peter, and if we go while she's there, it certainly looks as though we were condoning the affair."

"Is it going to make two pennyworth of difference, whether we condone it or whether we don't?"

"No, I suppose not."

"Well, then, what's to hinder our going over to pass the time of day with a sick man who's a jolly good chap, even if you do imagine him at the moment guilty of what our American friends call, 'Moral turpitude.'"

"It's very difficult to know what one ought to do," said Alice. "She's such a nice child, too. At least, she seems a nice child, and she struck me as being rather lonely. Such a wistful look in her eyes when I drove off. Rather like John's puppy when he's tied up after a game."

Bob laughed, long and loud. "First she's like a girl out of one of Barrie's plays—or a picture of Lady Hamilton with vine leaves in her hair—and now she bears a resemblance to John's puppy."

"Oh, well, she did look like that," said Alice stubbornly. "It was as though she said: 'Don't leave me. Take me with you!'"

"Not very flattering to our friend Peter! Is Jean waiting for an answer?"

"Yes. I suppose we're going?"

"Why ask me? You know we're going. You and I and John aren't likely to be very seriously contaminated by the poor little girl's presence there."

Alice sighed. "No, I suppose not," she agreed, again. "But it's a pity."

"What's a pity? That we're not likely to be contaminated, or that human nature's what it is?"

Mrs. Marshall paid no attention to his question. "If only Peter would give up that wretched Casino. He knows it's bad for his health, and he just doesn't seem to care."

"A short life and a merry one is evidently his motto."

"I don't know about that." Alice knitted her brows in an attempt to sum up Peter fairly. "He's not really wild—dissipated, I mean. I think he just doesn't take anything frightfully seriously. But he isn't extravagant and stupid—except gambling. After all, he lives very

simply here, and he gives an awful lot of money away. They say he practically keeps that Children's Holiday Home going."

"Wish he'd keep it going somewhere farther off then," grumbled Bob. "Some of the little devils got into the orchard last night and had a go at the cherries. I've sent over to the Matron about it."

"Did they do much damage?"

"Probably more to their own little tummies than to my cherry trees. But they've got to be warned off."

Alice dismissed both children and cherry trees, and returned to the subject in hand. "Then I'll tell Jean we'll be over this afternoon."

"Yes, of course. And send word to Peter, that we're glad to hear he's better."

Alice walked back to the house and delivered the message.

CHAPTER XVI

FOR the next three weeks, Hilary lived in a dream. It was as though, here in the peace of this lovely country at the foot of the Pyrenees, she had reached the land of the Lotus Eaters: or, perhaps, it would be a more truthful description of her state of mind, to say that she had come into possession of a private Lotus Garden. Neither Bob Marshall nor Alice could be aptly described as Lotus Eaters. They lived a strenuous life amongst their chickens; Dr. Dibart had never a spare moment in which to stay and chat; and the Basque farmers round about worked from sunrise until darkness fell. No idle dreamers these! It was only she, Hilary Ware, who was a Lotus Eater. She was held in some enchantment, unable to think of anything beyond the actual present.

Though Mrs. Marshall was often in at Biarritz, and gave Pierre a good deal of the local gossip, the outside world had practically ceased to exist for Hilary. She had looked at first each morning in the *Daily Mail,* searching for news of the Feltman case, but it seemed to have lost interest for newspaper readers. It was no longer mentioned: and gradually Hilary's fear of any threat to herself in connection with it faded. It was so safe here. Life had become a thing of beauty; and as each long, lovely, summer day drew to a close, a further veil seemed to be dropped between herself and the immediate past.

The Marshalls were kind and cheery neighbours, and they had apparently accepted her, quite naturally, as an ordinary visitor—a friend of Peter's. Why not? What

else was she? Never in any conversation between Pierre and herself had there been the slightest hint of sentiment.

Hilary refused to analyse her feeling for him. She drifted on from day to day, conscious only of a curious state of glamour; a growing sense of almost unbelievable happiness and joy.

He was up now—had been up for nearly a week. They sat together in the rose-scented garden, either quietly reading, or more often talking, and arguing, and finding a good deal in every argument at which to laugh. The same silly things amused them both. They drove out in the car, Hilary acting as chauffeur; and at the end of three weeks Larrialde could be looked upon as an invalid no longer. Dr. Dibart even pronounced him to be in better health at present than he had been for some time previously. That was because, in his bed on the balcony, he had fresh air night and day, instead of the close atmosphere of the Casino, so Dr. Dibart said; and Hilary believed him. She told Pierre, when he shrugged his shoulders, and smilingly denied it, that he knew he wasn't speaking the truth; and in any case it wasn't a laughing matter.

"Everything is a laughing matter if you see it at the right angle," he retorted.

To-day they were taking their lunch out in the car, to picnic in the forest, somewhere at the foot of the Pyrenees. Their first picnic! Absurd it was, Hilary told herself, that her heart should leap so high when Pierre proposed it. She'd picnicked often enough before. A picnic wasn't a riotously exciting entertainment. Why should she find the prospect of this one so enchanting?

It must be because the country was so beautiful, the day was so fine, and Pierre had promised to show her some of the lovely Basque villages on the way. They'd see Ramuntcho's village. She'd read the book now. It was too sad, she said.

They argued over this, as they passed out of the lane and through the village of Arvray. Was it only three

weeks ago, Hilary thought, since she had stood there under the beech tree, and watched the children marching by? Those were poor children from industrial towns, sent here for a country holiday. It was Peter's money which practically supported that charity. The encampment—rows of old soldiers' huts—was on his property. Alice Marshall had told her that. How was it possible, Hilary wondered, that she could have felt as wretched as she had done that day, three weeks ago? Why had she dreaded life? Wanting only to end it? Life was so beautiful—a glorious adventure! Poor Ramuntcho! Of course it was sad to come back after his three years' exile, to find the girl he loved a little nun, never destined to be his bride.

"To marry is to live happily ever after, you think?" Pierre teased her.

"No, but to . . . to love and to be parted is to lose all joy," she said.

"Love!" he echoed. "Does it exist outside the pages of a book?"

"Of course it does."

He laughed. "You've experienced it then? You know more than I do."

Why should those few careless words darken the day? Hilary was conscious that a sudden chill had fallen on her spirits. Ridiculous to be so much at the mercy of her moods! She dismissed a dimly apprehended doubt, and in a moment managed to smile quite naturally again.

The sun was very hot, and the sky was cloudless. In the fields the peasants were cutting the thick crops of dark red clover, gathering in the hay—men in berets driving with a short pole, the little fawn-coloured cows, or bigger oxen, harnessed to the two-wheeled wooden carts. Sometimes the animals wore linen trappings, to keep off the flies, and always they had large matted sheepskins to protect their heads from the sun, and to stop the chafing of the pole fastened to their horns. All the pull of the

cart was on those horns. A simple method of harnessing, and a simple method of driving: a gentle prod, with a thick stave. Kind to their beasts were these Basques, it seemed! Hilary somehow was glad of that. She wanted to believe all the good qualities in the world were possessed by the little Basque nation. Others thought so! Only yesterday she had read that the whole population had been described as 'la plus belle, la plus saine, la plus alerte, la plus joyeuse, qui puisse se trouver en Europe.'

Was Pierre all this? Perhaps not the most beautiful. The queer, laughing, grey-eyed face wasn't really handsome, but oh! how dear! Hilary, at the driving wheel, casting a sidelong glance at him, knew suddenly her own heart. She loved him!

She looked away again quickly. Fixed her attention on outward things. The lovely villages! Grey stone churches amongst green cypresses; high pink, or white-washed walls of the pelota courts; a pump above an old stone trough; an ancient wall from which the wild flowers hung in vivid-coloured garlands; whitewashed houses with gaily painted shutters; roses in the gardens; a woman sitting knitting in her doorway; men in rough, dark clothes, with berets on their heads, and sabots on their feet, playing cards and drinking their coffee, at the tables under the cool archways outside the inn.

Then on the roads, a woman with a panniered donkey; pink briars, purple foxgloves, and white elderberry flowers in the hedges; tall, stately poplars beside a stream, bordered with buttercups; and at last, the cool, deep shade of the forest.

They left the car under the canopy of a spreading oak, and made their way across a tree-trunk bridging a little brook. They were in a thicket of chestnuts, beech, and mossy oaks, with mistletoe climbing everywhere. Amongst the ferns, beside the stream, they spread rugs and cushions brought from the car, and then unpacked the hamper. Hilary had carried all the heavier things.

Pierre laughed at her little air of authority, but he did not dispute it. She was conscious of some obscure sense of joy in waiting upon him—insisting still upon his convalescence—and so claiming the right to serve him.

The sunlight came down through the green leaves above them in little splashes and flecks of light, and sparkled on the brown water that rippled over the stones. There were foxgloves and buttercups growing near them; and deep in the woods echoed the drowsy note of the cuckoo. It seemed as though the world belonged to them alone.

They had finished lunch, and repacked the hamper. Pierre lay leaning on his elbow, while Hilary sat beside him, her head thrown back against the mossy trunk of an ancient oak.

"It's time we talked of the future," said Larrialde suddenly. "You've been very good to me, nursing me —looking after me."

"I haven't done much nursing," said Hilary.

"I told you when . . . that night at the Casino, that I wasn't a brute, and I wasn't ungrateful. I'm neither. We made a bargain that night. But if you wish it—you are released."

There was a long silence between them. The brook rippled on, and far away the cuckoo called.

"You mean . . . you don't want me here?" said Hilary at last.

"That's not exactly what I mean. I'm a man with the ordinary passions and feelings of a man. I have no illusions as to platonic friendship. If you stay . . . we don't continue this pretty playing at it, that's all."

"Will you be quite honest with me?" Hilary's face had a queer, strained look, but her voice was steady.

"As honest as I know how to be."

"You would rather I stayed?"

"Of course."

"Do you love me?"

"I've told you I don't understand what these sentimentalists mean by love. I have grown fond of you."

"Do you love me as Prue loved the Weaver—her dear acquaintance—in that English book I lent you? As Ramuntcho loved Gracieuse?"

"No. That kind of love is story-book love. It bears no sort of resemblance to everyday life. It isn't true."

"It *is* true," said Hilary.

He turned to look at her, and it hurt her like a knife in her heart to see the laughing, mocking grey eyes regarding her. He wasn't real, this man. He was just Peter Pan—the boy who wouldn't grow up. No, he was real. He had grown up, but he was beyond her understanding. Was he merely callous, or was he intentionally cruel?

"You know then?" he said. "Tell me what it is? In what does this wonderful and romantic attachment differ from the ordinary desire of any man's life?"

She shook her head without answering. A little dumb, hopeless expression of her inability to explain in words.

"Was it for Roger—the friend with whom you came here, you felt this?"

"Would you believe me if I told you that Roger was never anything *more* than a friend to me? That I've never even . . . kissed him?"

He looked at her intently for a moment, but her clear eyes did not waver.

"Yes, I would believe you," he said at last: "if you tell me so. But if I must believe you, then I think Roger was a fool."

"Mightn't he have happened to be just . . . a gentleman?"

He laughed at this. "That has a fine roll of melodrama. One expects applause from the gallery. Of course. I forgot. You are an actress."

For a moment Hilary's lips trembled. "Why are you being so unkind—so cruel?" she asked.

His tone changed. "My child, you're mistaken. I'm not cruel. I was only teasing you, because I think you deceive yourself like a sentimental schoolgirl, in believing

that love is anything more than a purely natural impulse which we humans share with all the other creatures of the earth. And now, will you be honest with me? Will you answer *me* a question truthfully? "

"I won't promise," she returned.

"You're at least honest in that," he said. He smiled at her again. It wasn't possible to be angry with him when he smiled like that. Oh, it would be better, far better if she could be angry—if she could hate him!

"When you tell me Roger was nothing to you, I am convinced that you speak the truth. But you've puzzled me. Ever since that first night here, when you were so kind, and gentle, and so brave—not frightened or disgusted at the nasty business of my illness—you've been perplexing—a problem to me."

"Why? "

"Because that night at the Casino when we spoke together on the terrace, I had no doubts. I thought I knew you. To me you were merely one of the many charming ladies one meets—travelling with a friend—or playing alone at the tables, willing to accept . . . some new friendship."

"In other words, you didn't think I was respectable."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Respectable? That's a word you have in England. It was invented by your Mrs. Grundy. I don't know its meaning any more than I know the meaning of what you call 'love.' I would respect a woman who was true and faithful to her lover, and I would feel no respect for a perfectly faultless wife who had married for money or position a man she hated, and submitted herself to his embraces as a matter of duty. What is respectable? The marriage service makes all respectable according to Mrs. Grundy. I think otherwise."

"You don't believe in marriage? "

"Of course I do. Why not? For those who are sure they never wish the knot untied."

"You wouldn't feel like that? "

"I shouldn't like to face anything so irrevocable, either

for myself, or for the poor partner who might be tied to me, and who might be longing to be free. But we weren't discussing marriage."

"No, you were discussing me—my character," said Hilary in a hard voice. "Well, Mrs. Grundy might be shocked at a great many things I've done, but even she would have to admit that I'm 'respectable.' Is that what you wanted to know?"

"Not altogether. I think I had already settled that in my own mind. But being—not what I had thought you at first—why did you allow me to believe you otherwise? Why did you accept my offer that night at the Casino? If you had told me the truth then—that it was only money you wanted, I would have given it to you."

"Why?"

"Why not? When you have more than you can possibly spend yourself it doesn't hurt you much to part with some of it."

"Do you give money to anyone who asks?"

"Not to anyone who asks. I only give when I think my money's going to be of use. If it's going to alleviate pain—relieve anxiety—help a lame dog over a stile, heal him, and put him on his way again. I try not to refuse any urgent, personal appeal."

"I didn't deserve any help. I'd been a fool."

"Is there anyone living who hasn't been one?"

"Oh, not such a fool as I have been," said Hilary bitterly.

"Poor child!"

Oh, why did his voice when he said that so melt her heart? How could she leave him, now that she loved him so? How could she stay, and be to him merely an incident in his life? Make herself in truth, what he had at first mistakenly believed her?

"And you haven't answered my question. Why did you come home with me?"

"I'd lost all my money—and I saw something in the

paper—I was frightened. I wanted to get away—to hide."

"You were crying that night on the terrace."

"Was I?"

"That made me hesitate. I wondered if you were regretting . . . someone. Well, nothing has happened. You are free to go, and you need have no anxiety about money. You'll take enough to make your journey easy. The episode is ended, and nothing is changed for you."

Suddenly Hilary began to laugh. "How easy it all sounds," she said. "Nothing is changed . . . of course . . . nothing is changed!" Her laughter ceased. No, she mustn't laugh like that. There was only one thing he mustn't know; that she loved him—loved him so much that nothing in the world would have kept her from him if he really needed her. If he needed her! He didn't. And suddenly she knew how love—real love—differed from what he called 'the ordinary desire of any man's life.' It was not only a physical need, it was something more. It was a hunger of the soul—for understanding, for response. And the value, the importance of the loved one, was the only gauge of love. Of what value, of what importance, was she to Pierre? To satisfy 'the ordinary desire of any man's life.' Couldn't any woman do that? Any woman, but not *the* woman. Well, she was not 'the' woman for this man—the man she loved!

"It's settled then that I'm to go?" she said. "When?"

"Whenever you please."

"You can dismiss me very easily."

"Ah, no—that's not fair. I'm not sending you away. On the contrary, I'd much prefer that you should stay."

"How much do you prefer it?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Since you've decided to leave me, why need we discuss it?"

Desperately Hilary tried to read into his tone something she wished to find there. He was speaking carelessly, in

order to conceal a strong emotion! Deep in her heart she knew this wasn't true. He liked her—she was sufficiently desirable to make him regret her going—that was all.

Suddenly she put out her hand. "Peter, why must I go?"

His hand closed over hers, and held it tight. "There is no must about it. I've told you I should be happy if you stayed. I care for you more than a little."

"Will your caring last?"

"How can I tell? How can anyone tell that?"

She drew her hand away from him, and stood up. "It means so little to you," she said bitterly. "You're not even offering me your name."

"At least I'm not asking you to tie yourself for life to a man who may some day be a hopeless invalid."

Was that his only reason? Hope sprang again in her heart. Was he denying his love for her sake? No! He was denying nothing. He had told her frankly what his feeling for her was—it was not love.

He rose, and stood beside her. "It's time we were going back," he said. "Settle nothing now. Let me know in the morning."

"The morning?"

"I may be late to-night."

"Why? Where are you going?"

He smiled at her. "To the Casino. Will you come?"

She drew back as though she had received a blow. "You're going now, to the Casino?"

He glanced at the watch on his wrist. "Yes. If you won't come, I'll drop you at home, and take the car on."

"You're not fit to go!"

He laughed. "Not fit! Why, Dibart himself admits that I'm better now than I was before the attack."

"But he says that it will kill you—that kind of life—if you persist in it. That you must be prevented from going in, day after day, to those overheated, stuffy rooms."

"Prevented!" he echoed, smiling. "Who's to prevent me?"

Who indeed? Not Hilary Ware, it seemed.

She spoke very little going home, but she insisted on taking the wheel. If he were driving himself in to the Casino, at least she would save him the exertion of this first part of the journey.

"I'll get out at the lane," she said.

"You're sure you don't mind the walk up?"

How anxious he was to be off! Yet, even in spite of this, she tried once more. She stopped the car as they reached the lane, and for a moment she did not move. Then, again, she put out her hand and laid it on his arm. "For my sake! If I ask you not to go . . . to . . . to stay with me." Her voice was husky and shaken.

He took her hand and raised it to his lips, but it was merely a gallant gesture, nothing more. "I hate to refuse so sweet an invitation," he said. "But the Baccarat Room is calling. Remember I haven't seen it for over three weeks, and three weeks is a long time!"

She managed to call up a smile to answer his, and she stood and waved quite gaily to him as he drove away. But something in her heart seemed to have died.

CHAPTER XVII

SHE walked slowly back to the house. What should she do? Should she go, or stay? She could not bear the thought of the bitter loneliness of leaving him. And yet, how could she stay here now? Every hour would bring its own humiliation; the still more bitter realisation that the love she gave was unappreciated, and unreturned, not even comprehended. Her dream was over. Her lotus garden was destroyed: the flowers were trampled in the dust.

A car stood in the sunshine before the house. An old French taxi it seemed to be, and two men stood at the front door talking with Marie and Jean. Hilary knew that Marie's husband had never liked her. Now, however, Jean seemed to welcome her appearance. He turned smiling, to the two men, and pointed at her as she approached. Hilary could almost have believed that Marie laid a restraining hand upon his arm—as though she remonstrated with him over something. The two strangers stepped forward to meet her. One of them spoke English, of a kind.

Yes, her name was Hilary Ware, and she was English. She had her passport? Yes. Made out in that name? Oh, yes. Yet she had crossed from London to Bordeaux by steamer, in another name?

Before they told her, Hilary knew what it was they wanted. They held a warrant for her arrest. They acted for the British Authorities. They must take her now to the Bayonne prison, to await the coming of the

extradition papers. She must remain there until arrangements were completed, and then she would be taken back to London, to stand her trial. What for? For murder.

The Feltman murder mystery was at last to be cleared up.

Now that the blow had fallen, it seemed to Hilary that it had lost its power to crush. She had just passed through an emotional crisis which had left her, for the moment, powerless to feel further pain or fear. Later, she would experience both in full measure. Now, she accepted Marie's kindly help in packing a small suitcase; she thanked Marie for all she had done for her, and fumbled in her bag to find a more concrete expression of her goodwill. She found nothing. For the moment she had forgotten she was penniless. Well, Marie must accept her thanks alone. It was a pretty bag. She showed Marie that it was empty. She made a little gesture of regret, and then she put the bag in Marie's hand, and kissed her. It was all she had to give. She was penniless, and now a prisoner.

And yet she smiled at Marie, bowed to the two officers, and took her seat in the taxi with a little air that was almost gay. So, we are told, did the aristocrats step up into the tumbril to be driven to the guillotine.

Before they reached the entrance gates, she turned to take a last look at the old house. There it stood, still austere and pure, serene and undisturbed by all the passion, and the sorrow, and the joy, of the human life that had been lived out within its oak-beamed walls. Fate had decreed that she was not to stay! Fate had forced the issue, and had taken the decision out of her hands.

The car drove swiftly along the plane-tree bordered road towards Bayonne. The officer in charge explained to her that she would be treated well at Bayonne. It was not really such a hard prison as it was said to be. And as she was a foreigner, detained on behalf of another nation, in

connection with a crime committed in another country, she might have meals sent in from outside the prison. She must, of course, pay for them herself. And must pay also for any other small comforts she desired.

Hilary, remembering her empty purse, smiled and thanked him for the information.

Now they could see the two lovely spires of the cathedral above the trees. The car jerked on; over the cobbled stones of the narrow streets; the tall, balconied houses, with their latticed volets rising on either side and shutting out the light from the westering sun; the smell of coffee and tobacco heavy in the air.

First to the Palais de Justice they must go. Some formalities there to be complied with. But no, it was late —the Juge d'Instruction would see her next day at the prison.

The car moved forward once more. They were on the bridge now, crossing the shining Adour. All the life of the town was streaming past them; clanging trams, and hooting motor buses, going to Biarritz, to Boucau, to St. Jean-de-Luz; workmen in berets; hatless women garbed in neat black; army carts with white horses, and their attendant blue-uniformed soldiers. Here was the spot where she had stood with Roger. She could hear him saying: "Railway station, abattoir, prison"; and her own reply: "You're not going to drag me across to look at those, are you?" Less than a month ago! She had been a girl then. She was a woman now.

Over the bridge, along the quays, and on to a wide, straight road. A glimpse of the smooth, green river, every now and then, down side streets. Now, sharply to the left; a high stone wall; plane trees bordering the road; a house with gay window-boxes facing the blank wall; washing hung to dry, fluttering in the sunny wind.

The car went farther, then stopped before two great iron gates, set in the grim, grey wall. From across the road came the lowing of cattle. A little fawn-coloured calf tied under the plane trees answered with a quavering

bleat. That was the abattoir. The little creature was quite unconscious of its coming fate. There could be no terror in death if there were no anticipation of it.

But Hilary's eyes came back to rest upon the big dark gates that presently would open to receive her. 'Sonnette de Jour,' she read.

One of her warders rang the bell. It clanged loudly within. In a few moments bolts rattled. The gates were opened. Hilary suddenly thought of the statue by St. Martin's church. Perhaps she, too, was going to her doom. She wasn't a heroine. Only a foolish girl, paying the price of folly. But even she could try to be brave.

Steadfastness! Courage to meet death or disaster!

Hilary walked quietly into the wide stone courtyard, and the big gates clanged behind her.

The world was shut out now. She was in prison.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE woman warder was trying to explain something to her. What was it? She pulled Hilary's arm, not roughly or unkindly; her gesture was merely another method of telling the prisoner she was to leave her cell.

For a night and a day Hilary had been here alone. If she had been really conscious—fully alive—she thought, she couldn't have come through this twenty-four hours. But she wasn't quite alive. Part of her had died when Pierre drove off to the Casino yesterday. Yesterday—or a year ago? Time seemed to have lost its meaning.

She followed the woman along a narrow stone corridor, and was ushered into a small room, a sort of office it seemed to be. Two men were standing there; and one of them—a stranger—stepped forward to speak to her. The other stood silently regarding her. It was Peter!

For a moment she could hardly comprehend what the stranger was saying to her. He spoke in English. He was the English Consul. She was to apply to him for everything. Meals would be sent in to her—whatever she wished to order. He was arranging for a rather better cell—a few more comforts. He would leave her friend Monsieur Larrialde, to explain.

The woman warder still stood within the room, but now the Consul crossed to her, and spoke rapidly in French.

The woman nodded, and both she and the Consul stepped out into the corridor. The door was open, but at the farther end of the little room, Hilary and Larrialde were virtually alone.

"I've only a few minutes," he said hurriedly. "I've had the devil's own job getting permission to see you. I've been at it all day."

"All day? When did you know?"

"Not till seven this morning. I didn't get home till about three. Not a soul was stirring then. Marie only saw fit to tell me at seven—the fool! I rang up the Consul here, at once. I've had to go to Pau to arrange matters."

"To Pau! Oh, what a journey! You're not fit to. . . ."

"Never mind me," he said. "After all, I didn't walk. It's you we've got to think about. Listen now! I won't be able to see you again, but the Consul and Dibart will be allowed to call. You're to order everything you want—you understand—everything that the Authorities will allow you to have. The Consul will draw on me. You're not to consider expense—not to worry about money."

She did not try to thank him. She couldn't. She only said, a little brokenly: "Why should you do all this for me? Do you know why I'm here?"

"I found that out from the Consul."

She looked at him with wide, pitiful eyes. "I didn't do it," she said.

"Poor child!" Ah! the sweetness of hearing that again!

"Do you believe me?"

"Of course I do." He smiled at her, suddenly. "But if you had, do you think it would have made any difference? That I'd abandon you?"

"If I were a murderess?"

"It has an ugly sound. Yet even if you were that, well, I should know there was some very good explanation. I judge my friends by what they are—not by what they do." He came a step nearer to her. "Keep up your courage, and keep well."

"I'm all right. It's you. Oh, you mustn't be over-

tired—mustn't get ill again. Promise me—promise me you won't."

He laughed at her once more. "I promise. Now smile at me before I go."

Her strained face relaxed. Obediently, she smiled into the kind, grey eyes regarding her. The warder and the Consul could not see. Suddenly he took her in his arms, and kissed her. "My poor, brave, little one!" he whispered. Then he stepped back. "Good-bye. All will come right in the end."

They were gone, and Hilary was led back to her cell. What were the lines of the old song: "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage"? Her spirit was no longer in prison. Her heart was no longer dead. Oh, she knew that a kiss given like that in pity, wasn't love, but at least it was something. He did care. He cared sufficiently to take all this trouble to help her. Would he ever understand how her whole being melted with love and tenderness for him? Perhaps not. But at least she was in his thoughts now. He would be thinking of her sometimes. No longer could he remain quite indifferent to her. In this dark prison, where with the sunset all light faded: where sanitary conditions were such as she had never dreamed were possible: where hardships innumerable were to be endured, and intolerable loneliness lived through, she was not utterly crushed by present wretchedness, nor daunted by the apprehension of any horror to come.

"My poor, brave, little one!" she whispered that phrase, over and over again, to herself. She would prove it true. She would be brave.

CHAPTER XIX

FOR nearly a month Hilary remained in the Bayonne prison. She had received one or two visits from the Consul and Dr. Dibart; but though the latter was not unkind, his manner had undergone a subtle change. He was a little more distant to her, and his short interviews were taken up for the most part with inquiries as to her health. She did, however, elicit from him the information that, as far as he knew, Larrialde was keeping well. Later, the Consul informed her that Pierre had gone for a trip to England. Hilary's heart sank at this. Had he forgotten her? Perhaps it was on her account he had taken this journey? She wanted to believe this, but she could not quite convince herself that it was true. Her common sense told her not to be a fool. Larrialde was not in love with her. She knew that. She had enough honesty not to deceive herself so vainly. He had already done a great deal for her. Far more than many relatives, or friends of long standing, would do. Why should she imagine that he would go to all this further trouble on her behalf? Besides, what could he do in England for her? What was there that could be done until the real criminal was found? And surely, although she was being held like this, Scotland Yard wouldn't give up the search for anyone else. When they'd secured one suspected person, they wouldn't sit down quietly with folded hands, and say: "We needn't bother any further." They couldn't be certain of her guilt as yet.

Often in the long hours of the night Hilary went over the different personalities who might be connected with the crime. Gina was the one most frequently in her thoughts. Then, there was the man she had brushed against in the entrance hall of the flats; but she had no more reason to suspect him than she had to suspect any other resident of the mansions—except that she had thought him a particularly unpleasant-looking person. Feltman's man had found the body. He had a master key to the flat. No one else had that, the papers said.

Yet, although these were the only people whom Hilary could in any way connect with Feltman on that fatal night, the crime, in all probability, had been committed by someone she had never heard of—a burglar—an enemy. Feltman must have had many enemies!

Again and again, when the unsolved mystery returned to torment her, she endeavoured to dismiss it from her mind. How could she solve the problem, with no evidence? Nothing to go upon but those few facts which she had read in the paper? She could achieve nothing by dwelling on it. She must make a determined effort to prevent it from becoming an obsession.

The thought of her mother, too, troubled her terribly. How dreadful it would be for her to know that Hilary was in prison. What ought she to do? Ought she to ask for permission to write home? No, not yet. Not until she could explain everything. She was thankful, now, that her home was so far away. At least Mother needn't hear the news for some weeks, and by that time perhaps the truth would be established. The possibility that her name might have been cabled out to Australia, to appear in the papers there, never occurred to Hilary for one moment.

As an offset to all this questioning doubt and mental misery, Hilary knew she must find some task to occupy her mind. Something that would force her thoughts

away from her own wretchedness. The Consul provided her with a French dictionary and an easy French grammar. She was allowed a pencil and paper, and for the greater part of the day she wrote out exercises, and endeavoured to commit to memory the irregular French verbs. That helped her. It was something to fix her mind upon, to occupy her brain. She was determined to learn to speak this language. Because Pierre spoke French more fluently than English? Perhaps that influenced her. He had teased her about her French, and she had retaliated when he mispronounced an English word. But he did this so seldom, that she got very little chance of laughing at him. They had laughed so much together, in the past! If they ever met again he might be forced to acknowledge an improvement in her conversation.

If they ever met again! As the days lengthened into weeks, she wondered sometimes if he had forgotten her. That thought brought a pang of anguish, hard to bear. But she wouldn't give way to despondency. He had called her brave. She would be brave.

Late one evening the Consul came to tell her that she was to start for London on the following morning. She would leave Bayonne about eight o'clock, spend that night in Paris, and go on, via Calais, to London next day.

Hilary slept very little that night. Panic had seized her. She was terribly afraid of the journey. How would they take her? Would the other passengers on the train know that she was a prisoner? In London what awaited her?

These, and many other tormenting questions, and doubts, and fears, raced through her brain. And at the back of all, a more dreadful desolation lay like a black shadow on her heart. She was leaving the Basque country for ever. The Basque country! Peter's country! That was all it was to her. Probably she would never see him again. Never hear his voice, teasing, or mocking, or very kind, as it was when he said: " Poor child! "

He was back from England. The Consul told her he had called that day at the Consulate, when he—the Consul—was out. Larrialde had left no message.

This was the bitterest blow of all to Hilary. No message! Not even to say good-bye! And he knew that she was going.

It was a very pale-faced Hilary who stood next morning beside a stout Frenchwoman and two agents de la sûreté, upon the Bayonne platform. No one stared at her; for there was really nothing remarkable in a middle-aged Frenchwoman, two plainly dressed Frenchmen, and a young girl, travelling together in a reserved carriage. They took their seats. The train was starting. No one stared.

Yes. One young man glanced quickly in. His luggage was being passed along the corridor. His seat was in the next compartment. It was Pierre! She wasn't leaving him for ever! He was here with her—travelling on the train!

Hilary leant back, and closed her eyes. Her heart was beating so fast that she thought she would be suffocated. Oh, joy never kills! She wanted to sing aloud a song of thanksgiving.

She didn't sing. She remained perfectly still, leaning back there in her corner. She was as still as a little quiet lake, with the moon shining serenely over it.

She didn't sing; but someone else was singing. Hilary opened her eyes. They rested on the back of a young man who stood in the corridor looking out of the window. He was humming, in a quiet, contemplative fashion:

"It's a long way to Tipperary,
It's a long way to go.
But if friends are—travelling with you
The time mayn't seem so slow.
I'm no good—at making verses,
And I can't sing very well;
But my ef-forts may amuse you.
If they do I'll sing like hell."

He turned, and glanced idly in at the carriage. For just the fraction of a second their eyes met; and a smile of complete understanding flashed between them. The other occupants of the carriage suspected nothing. They were sublimely unconscious that their prisoner had received a message from the outside world. That Hilary and Peter had established a method of communication.

CHAPTER XX

AND this method of communication was used continually throughout the journey. Whenever the train stopped, a young man—hatless, hands in trouser pockets—strolled idly past the carriage window, or in the corridor, humming little snatches of popular songs. To the officers accompanying Hilary, the English words of these chansonettes were quite unremarkable, and quite unintelligible. To Hilary they were never unintelligible, and they were always remarkable. No poems, however great, had ever brought a warmer glow of gratitude and happiness to a poor girl's heart. He was here—with her. Only the wall of the compartment separated them. Sometimes she could even look at him. At moments he was so near, standing on the platform, that had she been free, she might have put out her hand and touched him.

He needn't have apologised for his singing. Even this half-articulated rendering of American foxtrots, and well-known English melodies, showed his voice to be true and sweet. The truest and sweetest in the world to Hilary. She had to admit, that perhaps he didn't shine as a poet. Those silly verses! Often they didn't rhyme, and very seldom did they scan; but between stations, she knew, he was busily concocting them, and she loved him for it. Loved him almost more for saying those foolish, idiotic things to try and amuse her, than for the occasional scraps of information he managed to

impart. Yet, it was comforting to know that there was someone in London, already engaged for her defence; and to be assured that all would be well—there was nothing to worry about.

They left the pine woods behind them—ran into Bordeaux. A longish wait here. One of the warders got out to purchase déjeuner. The musical young man, strolling on the platform, was more lyrical than ever. He sang, until the supply of verses ran out. But he didn't overdo it. Didn't draw attention to himself. It was all very casually, very absent-mindedly done. It was seldom that he even glanced in the direction of the carriage where Hilary sat.

Now, he was back in the train. They were moving again, out into the wide, sunlit plains of France. Vineyards everywhere; lovely woods. This journey, which Hilary had looked forward to as a martyrdom, was now to her an experience of joy. Glamour enfolded her. The world again was all beauty, and enchantment. Why? Because a man with teasing grey eyes, and a kind heart, was making up silly verses, to try and help her on the way. That was all. Ah, no, it was something more. She loved the man. He was here—near her. She was sufficiently important to him to occupy his mind. Of sufficient value to him to drag him hundreds of miles across France, on a journey that was made for her alone. She knew it was only for her sake he was travelling. There couldn't be any other reason. And now, she believed also, that his previous journey to England must have been taken on her behalf. Whatever suffering she had already endured; whatever misery lay before her; nothing could dim for Hilary the happiness of this present journey.

Here was Poitiers. Poitiers, a grey crag of a town, with glimpses of old walls and ramparts. Victory of the Black Prince at Poitiers, 1356! A date from her schooldays flashed into her mind. The Battle of Poitiers might have been a mythical legend, for all she'd

ever thought about it before. Now, a vision of knights in armour; English bowmen; flashed upon her. Chivalry! Had any woman of medieval times known more true chivalry than Hilary knew at this moment? Had she ever met so true and kind a knight-errant? Oh, chivalry had nothing to do with love, Hilary knew that well enough, but it warmed and comforted one's heart nevertheless.

Hour after hour passed. Vineyard and woodland, all the fair landscape of lovely France, streamed by beyond the carriage windows.

The chateaux country; the smooth green waters of the Loire; Tours; Blois. A long journey—nearly fourteen hours in the train—but not too long for Hilary. She almost wished that it would never end. But here was Paris at last. Paris in the soft, first darkness of the summer's night.

Pierre apparently had trouble with his luggage. It delayed him on the platform, and he managed to brush against Hilary as she passed in the crowd. "Smile! All will be well." For just one second they smiled into each other's eyes. Who wouldn't be brave after that? thought Hilary. How good he was—how good!

Would he be travelling farther than Paris? All night she wondered that. Somehow, she felt sure he was going on; that at least he would be with her until she was delivered into the hands of the British Authorities. Further than that she didn't dare to hope. Perhaps if the English officers were waiting for her at Calais, he would feel that his responsibility ended there. Desperately Hilary hoped that her present gaolers would take her all the way to Dover.

Yes, her surmise as to his travelling on from Paris with them was correct. He was on the platform at the Gare du Nord before they reached it next morning; and his luggage was in the compartment next to the one reserved for her and her companions.

Another four hours in the train. Not quite so much

singing now. No waits at the station platforms, for a young man in a grey suit, to lounge along, idly humming popular songs. Yes, once during a temporary halt, a verse did come floating in from without:

" I'd sing thee Songs of Araby
But shan't get much more chance,
Yet when we reach our journey's end
Look out to see me advance.
Although my remarks may seem to be
Addressed to those near at hand,
They'll really be between you and me.
And I hope you'll understand
If when we reach the other shore
I don't sing these songs any more."

Hilary was close beside the window, and so could catch the half-spoken words distinctly; but if there were English people in the next compartment, she knew that only the familiar melody would reach them, and the words would be a mere jumble of sound to which they wouldn't be likely to pay attention. Even if they did, the odd phrasing would mean nothing to them. Only Hilary held the clue to the song. To her it was a perfect gold mine of information—a treasure trove. She was to do her best to keep near him in the crowd at Calais, and the words he spoke to porters, or anyone beside him, were really addressed to her. More than anything else her heart thrilled to the knowledge that he was crossing with her; and surely he must be going on to London, for the last two lines seemed to convey that meaning. If he were to ' reach the other shore ' only to return to France, it would be unnecessary to inform her that he wouldn't sing ' these songs any more.' The lines gave her something to think of all the rest of the journey. Oh, she'd make every effort, never fear, to keep near him in the crowd when they reached the quay at Calais. Who was the English king—Richard Cœur de Lion, wasn't it?—who, immured in a fortress in Austria, was helped in his escape by a minstrel friend singing under his window? She, Hilary Ware, had her

own minstrel friend here now; and if he couldn't help her to escape from her present imprisonment, he was doing his utmost to cheer her up in her captivity, and he seemed to promise to do his best to rescue her eventually.

Calais! Out of the train; moving with the surging crowd towards the barriers; porters seizing baggage. Close beside her Pierre's voice speaking to the man who carried his suitcases—the deck hand from the Dover boat. "I wanted to help a friend with her luggage. Can't see her now." He was staring over Hilary's head.

"Difficult to keep track of people in the crowd. She'll be all right, though, sir. Plenty of porters."

"Yes, and if I miss her now, I'll probably meet her on the train the other side. And, anyhow, I'm to visit her in London, this evening."

"Yes, sir?" The young porter looked mildly surprised at these confidences.

"Hope she won't be sick, crossing."

"It's just a bit choppy, sir, not really rough."

"No, of course it isn't. And, after all, it's only a little over an hour on the water."

"That's all, sir."

"Women dislike being sea-sick more than men do. They think it's so unromantic."

"Well, it is a bit, sir, isn't it?"

"It's a perfectly natural human weakness. Nothing to be ashamed of. But I shouldn't like her to feel ill."

"No, sir; of course not, sir."

"I wish I could find her. However, I'm sure she'll understand I wanted to help her—and I'll be seeing her this evening."

"Yes, sir. Is she a young lady, if I may ask, sir?"

"Oh, yes, quite young. And very pretty. She squints rather badly at times, poor girl, that's all."

"Really, sir?"

The crowd surged in between them, but in spite of

everything—the tragedy that might lie before her—Hilary was laughing. She couldn't help it, and she knew that Pierre had wanted her to laugh. He had meant her to understand that he would be with her on the journey, sympathising with her even if she were unromantically sea-sick. And he would see her this evening! That was the most wonderful part of the message.

A cabin had been reserved for the female officer and herself, and the crossing was not really rough. At Dover, Hilary looked in vain for Pierre. She was in the hands of the English Authorities now. A policewoman accompanied the member of the C.I.D. detailed to escort her. They were both in plain clothes, and quite kind to her; but they took her down the gangway, through the crowd of passengers, and along the station platform, without any loss of time. Once in the reserved compartment, she could not catch a glimpse of Peter, but he was somewhere on the train she knew. The policewoman ordered tea for her. Before she had finished it the train moved off.

A lovely summer's afternoon! The fresh wind had so cleared the air, that cliffs appeared sharply outlined, and vividly white; hillsides brightly green; and amongst the rocks and seaweed of the shore, the blue water of the Channel was blown in bright, dashing waves. There were picnickers on the beach; children scrambling over the rocks. They were free! Hilary's heart was contracted with a sudden, gripping fear. The dream journey was over. There was reality to face now. Was it possible that she might never again know anything but the stone walls of a prison? Through the windows as the train moved swiftly on, she looked out on all the beauty of the English countryside. Shady woods, where earlier the bluebells had spread their azure carpet; parks and gardens, bright with summer flowers; old brown farmhouses; and meadows full of buttercups and daisies. Hop-fields everywhere here, took the place of the vineyards of France.

How wonderful and beautiful the wide world was! Suppose that for ever, she must be shut away from it!

No, she wouldn't suppose anything so terrible! She wouldn't, she wouldn't! "Smile! All will be well." She remembered Peter's words. She fought down the rising tide of dreadful fear within her. He was in the train—here—near her. She wouldn't prove herself a coward. She would be brave.

At Victoria, she saw him only for a moment. He was pushing his way desperately through the crowd, to get near to her. It wasn't possible for him to achieve his purpose. Hilary was told to get into a waiting taxi, but before she did so, she managed, across the crowd, to throw a smile at Peter.

At least she had managed that! Managed to smile at him, while shaking with an almost uncontrollable terror, she stepped into the taxi which was to drive her to the Bow Street police station.

BOOK III

BOW STREET AND OLD BAILEY

table. The door was shut behind her, and though at the small square aperture a face occasionally peered at them from without, she and the two men were alone within the room.

"This is Miss Ware," said Pierre. He turned to Hilary. "And this is Mr. Trenchard, your solicitor. He was a friend of my father's, and is my own good friend."

The other man moved forward and shook hands with her. "Sit down here." He placed a chair for her.

Hilary was glad to sit down. Her knees were shaking. But Pierre and the lawyer talked together to give her time to regain her self-control. In her one glance at Trenchard she had received the impression of a dark, clever face. Lined and grave, but kindly.

"Tell me everything you can," he said.

"I didn't . . . didn't kill him."

"Well, our job is to find out who did. We must know all that you knew of Feltman—who his friends were—and every detail you can think of in connection with that last night. When did you first meet him?"

"At a party. It was while I was playing in a revue."

"Was the party at his flat?"

"No." She looked down at her hands clasped together in her lap to keep them steady. If she couldn't preserve her self-control here, alone with two friends whose only desire was to help her, what sort of chance would she have of avoiding utter collapse when charged in open court? "My poor, brave, little one!" She remembered Pierre's whispered words, and her voice was steadier when she spoke again.

"I was living in a flat with Nan Stirling then, and the party was given by a friend of Gina Gould's. I dressed with Gina at the theatre—I mean we shared the same dressing-room." As briefly, and as unemotionally as she could, she told her story. She did not attempt to make excuses for herself. She wanted Pierre to know everything. Only when she came to speak of the pictures

Feltman showed her, did her voice falter. "I hadn't allowed myself to listen when some instinct warned me against him. I was shutting my eyes to the truth because I wanted to take his money. I'd been desperately hard up, and everything depended upon my getting an engagement with him, or having enough money to carry me on until I found other work. But when he showed me those pictures"—her voice shook, and she closed her eyes, just as she had done on that awful night—"I knew then what sort of . . . sort of . . . loathsome man he was. I felt sick . . . a sort of dreadful horror, and a terror too. I told you he'd put his arms round me. That was when the telephone bell rang. I thought it was Gina he was talking to. He said: 'Gina!' But he might only have been speaking of her to someone else."

"You'd handled the revolver?"

"Yes, when he took it out of the case, he passed it to me. I held it by the barrel, and put it on the table."

"And when he was called to the telephone, you ran away, and left the hall door open?"

"Yes, I was afraid he'd hear me if I closed it."

"You're quite sure about the door?"

"Quite sure."

"Do you think anyone was in the flat while you were there?"

"If there was anyone, I'm certain he didn't know it. He thought we were alone."

"Well, if there was no one concealed in the flat while you were there, someone must have slipped in through the open door almost as soon as you left. For someone closed that door. The police have established the fact that the door was shut soon after you left the flat. Of course Feltman may have come to the door when he found you gone, and may himself have closed it."

There were more questions to be answered. Hilary tried to deal with them as she would have dealt with an ordinary business interrogation. If only she might be alone with Pierre—might tell him a little of what was in

her heart! That wasn't possible, but she did get a few moments before they parted in which to speak to him. Trenchard stood near the door, apparently deeply engaged in jotting down particulars of the interview. He paid no attention to the two who sat together a few feet away at the small table, talking in lowered tones.

"I can't . . . can't thank you properly," said Hilary.

"Thank me for what? Would you turn your back on a friend who was in a difficult position—a friend you might help? I think not. There was a doctor once to be fetched from Bayonne."

"Oh, that—it was nothing."

"What I am doing is less than that."

"You're giving up your time." She flashed a wan little smile at him. "The Casino! What about that?"

"I haven't played since the night after we talked in the forest. I shan't play again until you're free."

"You may be promising for a longer period than you think," she said soberly.

"I won't put it that way. You will be free soon. Of that I am certain. But I won't play again until you tell me that I may."

She smiled at him once more. This time his eyes held hers; and something in his look brought the colour into her pale cheeks, and made her heart beat faster. Oh, she was allowing her imagination to run away with her again! Looking down at her clasped hands, she told herself not to be a fool, yet could not check the surge of joy within her.

"You are not to worry about your people in Australia," he went on. "I have sent full instructions by cable to a lawyer in Sydney. If your name appears in the papers . . ."

She raised suddenly fearful eyes to his. "In the papers?" she echoed.

"They cable these things out sometimes, you know. But if anything gets into print out there, your mother will be seen at once—will be reassured—told that the matter

will be cleared up almost immediately, and that you are in no need of money—you have friends working for you."

Her lips trembled. "Friends! One friend who is the best . . . the kindest . . ." She stopped, and he leant closer, putting his hand over hers, clasped together in her lap.

"I may not be able to see very much of you after to-day. Not until you are free. Then we can talk together alone. But I shall be thinking of you always—remember that—working for you."

"When do you go back?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "We won't talk of that until you're free."

"You're staying in England?"

"Of course! Haven't I told you so? Do I run away when my friends are in trouble—when they need me?"

She knew that her eyes were full of tears. She couldn't look up. "That night at the Casino—after I lost my money—when I pretended I must write a cheque, I saw about this case in the paper. It was lying on the table. I hadn't known a word about it before. I didn't know the police were looking for me until that moment. I was terrified. I wanted to throw myself in the sea, and I was a coward, I couldn't. And I had nowhere in the world to go to—to hide—and so when you said . . ."

"Poor little girl!" His hand was still over both of hers—holding them tight. "Why didn't you tell me then? Tell all that when we spoke together on the terrace? Things might have been different if you had. I was wrong. Some day I'll ask you to forgive me. Not now."

"We must go," said Trenchard. He came back towards them. "Good-bye, Miss Ware. To-morrow you will appear in the Police Court here. That's merely to take evidence of your arrest. We shall apply for bail, but I'm almost certain it will be refused. You'll

probably be remanded to Holloway for a week. Then you will be brought back again to this Court."

"And then?"

Trenchard hesitated. "If then you're committed for trial, you'll return to Holloway to wait for the sessions at the Old Bailey. But before September this mystery will be cleared up, never fear. Your friend Larrialde here has got one of the cleverest private detectives in London working on it already, and Scotland Yard didn't finish the case by apprehending you, you know. Cheer up! You mustn't be down-hearted."

"She's not down-hearted," said Larrialde stoutly. "She's what you Britishers call 'a good plucked 'un.'"

Hilary tried desperately to choke back her tears. The door was opened by a police officer. "Good-bye," said Larrialde. He held her hand closely within his own for a moment, and then was gone.

CHAPTER II

TRENCHARD dined with Pierre that evening at the Savoy. Their conversation had never strayed far from the Feltman case.

"One feels this isn't right," said Pierre suddenly.

"What isn't right?" asked Trenchard.

"All this." With a sweep of his hand Pierre indicated the whole spacious, softly carpeted room, with its green walls, and rose-coloured hangings; the lights gleaming on the silver and spotless damask of the table.

Trenchard looked puzzled. "What's wrong with it?"

The orchestra was playing, deft waiters moved swiftly about amongst the well-dressed, well-fed crowd of diners.

"It's all wrong for me, while a friend is alone and wretched, shut away in a little bare cell."

Trenchard laughed. "Could you do her any good by living yourself as an anchorite?"

"I suppose not. Still it gives one a guilty feeling."

The word seemed to rivet Trenchard's attention. He turned it over in his mind. "The case might be easier if she *were* guilty," he said.

"But she isn't."

"No . . ." the lawyer hesitated. "Yet, if she could plead justifiable homicide—and if there weren't any other complications—if the truth were that she used that revolver in self-defence—I don't believe there would be

the faintest likelihood of any jury convicting her. You know, those pictures she spoke of were found in the flat. They in themselves are quite enough to show the sort of creature Feltman was. They'd be enough without more evidence—and heaven knows there's plenty of it—as to his character."

"What do you mean by 'other complications'?"

"Well, you see even there—with the plea of self-defence—we'd be up against difficulties. Feltman was a swine—granted. But this girl admits she took money from him. She was an actress. God knows why that should prejudice her in the public's eyes—some of the finest women in the world are on the English stage—but it would. She knew his reputation. She took the money—she admits that—and those notes were traced when she changed them at Bordeaux. She ran away using another girl's name. Then when she was arrested . . ." he paused.

"Well?"

"She was living in your house. It doesn't go together—in one piece—with the idea of the girl killing a man 'in defence of her honour,' as the good old phrase has it."

"I've told you she has never been anything to me. Do you think I've lied?"

"It's not what I think," answered Trenchard drily. "It's what the jury are going to think."

"Well, all that is beside the point. She didn't do this thing, and we've got to find out who did."

"Yes. But we've also got to face the possibility that we may not find it out before September. The case will probably come on then."

"You think she'll be committed for trial?"

"I don't think. There isn't the slightest doubt of that."

"Poor child. It's a good thing for us we're not all called upon to pay such a big price for our follies. It's been nothing more in her case."

"No, I think you're right. She's got honest eyes.

And that queer little wistful look in them won't do us any harm with the jury." Trenchard rose. "It's a thousand pities that she ever got herself mixed up with such a sordid lot. We've already dug up some pretty details with regard to Feltman's past, and we're likely to discover any amount more. Before we've finished I fancy we'll have furnished the gutter press with as much lurid copy as even they could desire. See you to-morrow?"

"I'll be at the Court before it opens."

"Right. Look after yourself, Peter; your father was a very good friend to me, and I've got rather a soft spot in my heart for anyone of the name of Larrialde."

Pierre bowed. "Even for the scaramouch son?"

"Oh, not quite such a scaramouch as he makes himself out to be. A bit of a fool, that's all."

Peter bowed again with an elaborate air of politeness. "Thanks. You mean my morals are irreproachable, but my head is weak."

Trenchard laughed. "You know very well what I mean. Come along with me. A walk will do you good."

"You're going back to the office?"

"Yes. For an hour or two."

They strolled together down the Strand as far as the Law Courts, and then turned up towards Lincoln's Inn. In the gardens a band was playing. The wind had dropped, and the big trees were still and silent, as though listening to the music in the dusk.

"This Gina Gould," said Trenchard, after a short pause. "I think it's pretty evident that she was mixed up to a considerable extent with Feltman's affairs. From what Miss Ware said it's clear the Gould girl had been jealous. Then there's the individual who entered the flats just as Miss Ware was leaving. We've got to find out his identity. Feltman's man—who discovered the body—is apparently regarded by the police as beyond suspicion. He seems to have established a conclusive alibi. Those are the three mentioned by Miss Ware."

"But of course there are hosts of others."

"Of course. There was a party on in one of the upper flats. The outer doors were left open till three a.m. the morning of the murder—on account of this party. That is about half an hour after Miss Ware left. Someone may have come in."

"The hall porter would have seen anyone enter."

"Not necessarily. He was called upstairs with the lift once at least."

"What about the hall porter himself?"

"A man of unblemished character. A soldier. There would have been no motive in his case. No, I don't think it's quite as simple as all that. Miss Gina Gould might help us."

"She must help us, but we've got to find her first."

Larrialde walked on after he had parted from the lawyer. Darkness had deepened when he reached the big block of flats, with four marble steps leading up into a luxurious hall. After a moment's hesitation, he walked in. The one-armed porter seated in an easy chair, rose and saluted.

"Yes, sir?"

"I wonder if you can tell me whether there are any flats to let in this block?"

"I haven't anything to do with that, sir. If you call at the Estate Office in the morning . . ."

"I thought I saw boards outside."

"Well, there are one or two to let, I know, sir. But of course I'm not concerned with the business side."

"That was Feltman's flat, wasn't it?" said Larrialde, indicating the door at the top of six shallow stairs on the right.

The porter nodded. "That's to let," he answered, a trifle drily.

"Not furnished is it?"

"No, sir."

"I want a furnished one. I don't suppose a . . . a case of this sort does the estate much good, does it?"

"You're right, sir. Quite a lot of tenants have left since that happened."

"You were here that night, weren't you—on duty?"

"The police have warned me not to discuss the case, sir, with strangers."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to seem inquisitive. Have a cigar?"

"Thank you, sir." The porter fumbled at the case.

"Here! Half a minute!" said Larrialde. "I'll get it out."

"Thank you, sir. It's awkward sometimes with one hand."

"The war, of course?"

"Yes, sir. I suppose I was one of the lucky ones. I came through. Knocked out in '16 on the Somme."

"My three brothers were killed in 1916."

The porter nodded. His sad eyes darkened. "Hell it was then," he said. "You yourself wouldn't be . . ."

"I was at school—envying my brothers—making plans to run away to France."

"Most of us there would have been glad enough to make plans to run away *from* France," said the porter. "Were your brothers with the Regulars, if I may ask, sir?"

"They were all in the French Army."

A sudden light seemed to flash up in the porter's face. His voice showed a quickened interest. "French are you, sir?"

"A French subject, yes. Born in France, but not really of French blood. Ours was a Basque family."

"Yes, sir." It was quite evident that the porter didn't understand what Larrialde meant. "I was fond of the French," he said at last. He looked at Larrialde intently. "You talk French I suppose, sir?"

"Oh, yes. A good deal better than I talk English," said Larrialde, laughing.

"I don't see how that would be," returned the porter politely. "No one would take you for a foreigner, sir."

"I was at school in England for a long time. Where's the Estate Office for the flats?"

"Out of the front here, and to the right. They open at nine-thirty in the morning. If you're wanting a furnished flat I don't think you'll have much difficulty in getting one here. I hope you'll come, sir, if I may say so."

"I hope so too." Larrialde knew that in a few minutes some bond of sympathy had been established between himself and this rather sad-eyed soldier; and he was convinced that later he would be able to find out all that the porter knew of the Feltman case, in spite of the fact that the police had warned the man to be chary of discussion. Instinctively, Larrialde was aware that this man liked him. Well, the liking was mutual. All lame dogs made an instant appeal to Larrialde's sympathy. And in this case it was not so much the empty sleeve that aroused his pity, as the look of sadness in the porter's eyes. Personal physical loss—the loss of a limb—hadn't given him that look. The tragedy of war, Pierre thought, had put its mark for ever on this one-armed soldier.

CHAPTER III

AT eleven o'clock next morning Hilary was led across the courtyard, which lies between the cells and the side entrance to Bow Street Police Court. The sunshine was hot on the concrete paving of the yard, and within the Court Room, from the high glass dome, the yellow light fell in long bars along the oak-panelled walls.

As she entered the Court everything seemed blurred to Hilary. It wasn't dark, but for a moment her eyes refused to do their accustomed work. It was as though the brain ordered them off duty. The desperate longing not to be forced to face this shameful humiliation, was urging her subconscious mind to take any possible way of escape—to paralyse her faculties if necessary. To faint would be one means of doing this. Oh joy, to forget everything if only for a few moments!

Hilary recognised that the coward in her was thus urging evasion of present misery. It was this inner enemy she had to fight. Oh, easy to be brave if one had no traitor within the citadel to betray one to the foe! Quite clearly the girl realised that until she had conquered her own weakness, she was defenceless.

And now she saw a line of faces behind a barrier on her left—the curious spectators—pushing forward, elbowing each other, in their desire to get the best possible view of the drama. The enclosure in which they stood was almost like the pit of a theatre, but this was a free show! No entrance money to pay for this!

Pierre and Trenchard sat in front of the barrier, in one of the high wooden seats that looked like the pews of a church. There were many police constables, and various officials, scattered about the Court; and the magistrate's raised chair, flanked by glass-fronted book-cases, faced Hilary as she entered the iron-railed dock.

In the witness box evidence as to the prisoner's arrest was being given. Still struggling to master her desperate fear, Hilary held to the iron railing of the dock. "Oh God, let me be brave. Not a pitiful coward. Please, please let me be brave." She was praying now for courage. The Court Room was very quiet. The voice of the witness was only a little thread of sound. The tired, grey-haired magistrate sat with his hand shading his eyes. From the streets without came the voices of children playing—gay shouts and laughter. And all at once Hilary felt herself back in the old Basque church at Arvray. There were children playing out in the sunshine, amongst the rose-garlanded tombs and the tall cypresses. The church was full of a quiet peace. Centuries of prayer this church had heard. The little shrines were decked with flowers. Simple peasants, believing in the miraculous power of saints, had placed those flowers there. Yet Hilary had found no ease for pain that day, there in the church. No comfort then. Now, in the hush of the warm Court Room—the eager spectators crowding behind her, and the tired magistrate before her—the comfort that she had failed to find in the cool quietness of the House of God, welled suddenly within her. The House of God! Wasn't this prosaic Court Room as much the House of God as that old lovely church? All the sad, sordid histories that this Court had heard, weren't they just the records of children astray through weakness, and mischance, and ignorance? And all the poor sinners that this dock had held, weren't they just pitiful human creatures to whom Christ would have been kind?

Poor humanity! What a struggle through the ages! Always with some ideal to reach, falling and failing so

often and so much, but with a little spark of something divine—the light of God—never quite extinguished in their hearts. To Hilary, the Court Room—the whole universe, faded. Our little quarrels over creeds and customs were so small. We couldn't help that. We were only children—learning. God was above all. And we were part of God. Every man and woman part of one great whole. Nothing to fear then from anyone. We were all one, and some wider and infinitely more wonderful existence awaited all humanity. This life—the age of this known world—was so infinitesimal in Eternity: Eternity which was ours with God.

Hilary was still holding to the iron rail of the dock, but the blind panic she had felt was gone. Fear might be with her often in the future, but never would she know again the nerve-shattering dread which to-day had threatened to overwhelm her. Of that she felt quite sure. Some strength was hers with which to withstand terror. Why had she disbelieved in miracles? Hadn't a miracle happened to her here, within the last few minutes? Yes. Her prayer had been answered. She had found courage.

As she left the dock she turned, smiling, to Pierre and Trenchard. She wished she could tell Pierre what she felt—the spiritual experience she had just been through. But that must wait. Even if eventually she was sentenced to imprisonment, it wouldn't be for ever. Some day she and Pierre would meet once more, and then she could tell him. And if they never met again in this life—if he or she passed over before she had served her sentence out . . . her heart quailed at that, but still in thought she went on bravely . . . even then they would meet somewhere. She loved him so dearly. That love was strong enough to last beyond the grave. She'd meet him somewhere—and somewhere they would at last talk openly and freely to one another, and she would show him all her heart.

Trenchard had applied for bail, but the application had been refused. He and Pierre had only a few moments consultation with her before she left. It was enough for

her to whisper to Pierre: "Don't worry about me. I'm not frightened any more—not dreadfully frightened. Some day I'll tell you why." Then she smiled at him—a quick brave smile. In another second she had passed out with her escort, to enter the car that was to take her off to a prison cell at Holloway.

CHAPTER IV

BEFORE Hilary Ware was committed for trial, Larrialde had moved into a furnished flat in the mansions where Feltman had once lived. Why he went there Pierre could not explain even to himself. An obscure—and possibly absurd—reasoning led him to believe that to be actually on the scene of the murder might help him, in some way, to unravel the mystery.

The search for Gina Gould had ended suddenly, and in an eminently undramatic manner. Gina was advertised to appear in a new revue in London, and Gina, interviewed by the C.I.D., had nothing to tell them, beyond a perfectly well authenticated account of a trip she had taken to Berlin soon after her engagement with Hilary had ended. She had been backwards and forwards to London once or twice since then, and she had happened to be in London when the Feltman murder took place; but as she had not seen Feltman for some weeks before it occurred, and as she had never really been very greatly interested in the man—oh, yes, she'd allowed him to take her about a little, and pay for some of her frocks, but she allowed lots of men that privilege—she didn't see what his death had to do with her.

Had she telephoned to Feltman that night? Of course she hadn't. She was enjoying herself far too much to be bothering with the 'phone that evening. She'd been with four or five friends in a flat off Tottenham Court Road

until four a.m. They could all swear to her presence there; and as the outer doors of the mansions where the murder took place had been closed at three that morning, and the porter had certainly not admitted her, how was she supposed to have gained access to Feltman's flat? Anything else anybody would like to know? She didn't want to be rude, but she thought it was damned good cheek to be wasting her time like this. She'd got a rehearsal at eleven.

Gina of course was only one of the hundreds of people interrogated by Scotland Yard. They had no more reason to suspect her of complicity in the crime, than they had to suspect a score of other young women in whom Feltman had at different times shown a little interest. It was only Larrialde and Trenchard who seemed to have any real suspicion of Gina, and this was merely because Hilary had heard Feltman mention her name that night at the telephone, and because Hilary had a feeling that the connection between Gina and Feltman was closer than anyone else imagined.

Although Larrialde had not been allowed to interview Hilary alone, he had seen her once or twice at Holloway, and he was in Court when she was committed for trial. It was quite evident to him that she had gained something in poise. Her face was sad, and her little wistful smile was very pathetic, but she had lost the ' driven ' look which she had worn at first. She seemed to have reached some quiet place where she possessed her soul in patience.

Larrialde spent a great deal of his time with Trenchard in these days. He motored with the lawyer out to Holloway, and sat quietly through all Trenchard's interviews with the girl. To Hilary the knowledge that Pierre was near her like this was the next best thing to talking to him alone. They were never able to speak of personal matters, but she knew now from many things the solicitor said, that Pierre never spared himself if he thought he could help a friend in trouble. And so she

could not flatter herself that the feeling Larrialde had for her was anything warmer than friendship; but her gratitude for the practical interest he took in her welfare, was very real, and very deep.

" She's rather wonderful, that child," said Trenchard one day as he taxied back from Holloway with Pierre. " She's pulled herself together marvellously since the first day we interviewed her at Bow Street. And she tries so hard to be brave and helpful. This man she brushed against as she was leaving the flats that night—we've got to find him."

" Do you think he knew anything of the affair? "

" Perhaps not. But we must discover all we can of anyone who was near the spot that night."

" She said, didn't she, that he turned round to look at her, and that he followed her for a few yards along the street? "

" No, she can't be sure of that—that he followed her—apparently she was so terrified that she thought everyone was following her. The queer part of it is that your friend the night porter didn't see anyone come in just after she left."

" But he admits that he took the lift up for one of the guests at the party on the second floor almost immediately. Half a minute would be enough for any resident of the flats to walk in unobserved."

" Or for anyone from the street to slip into Feltman's flat through that open door. Yes, we've certainly got to find out who it was Miss Ware met that night."

" The police seem to be quite satisfied that anyone who entered the mansions about that time had a perfectly good reason for doing so," said Pierre. " However, I'll talk it over again with Nevill—the porter—and see if he knew anyone answering to the description. Nevill's much more communicative now than he was at first. All the same I think we're on a wrong trail there. Gina Gould knows more about this affair than she's admitted, I'm convinced of that. I'm not saying she shot Feltman, but

I believe there are many stories of the man's past that the police haven't yet dug up, and Gina Gould knows one at least of them."

"Of course the prosecution have a pretty clear case against the poor child they've arrested, haven't they?" said Trenchard after a moment. "They'll admit her story is true enough up to a certain point. She says she didn't use the revolver against Feltman. They say she did. What motive would anyone else have for shooting him? Not robbery. Nothing was taken—except the fifty pounds Hilary Ware had. The prosecution may even deny her statement that those notes were given to her. They may say she stole them. Motive in her case is clear enough, but with anyone else . . . ?"

"Revenge, I suppose."

"Revenge, perhaps. There are plenty of people I imagine who owed that man a grudge, but how did the murderer get into the flat that night? By the way, the actress who shared Hilary Ware's flat—Miss, or Mrs. Stirling—is back from South Africa. She arrived yesterday."

"Where is she staying?"

"She's at the flat in Westminster."

"She knew Gina Gould, and knew the set Feltman was mixed up with," said Larrialde. "She might give us some information."

"She'll do anything she can to help our client," returned Trenchard. "She wrote to me to that effect to-day. I gather that she's quite in the dark as to the facts of the case, but she said something about owing Miss Ware money."

"Shall I call and see her?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea. You can find out if she's likely to be of any use to us, or if she's merely a voluble time-waster. Do you know the address?"

"Yes, if it's Hilary Ware's flat."

"It is. When do you propose going?"

"No time like the present. I'll drive round there as

soon as I've dropped you at the office, and chance finding her in."

"Good. If you discover anything at all, call and see me to-morrow."

"I'll probably call in any case," returned Pierre, smiling. "I seem to be monopolising most of your time at present. You'll be chucking me out of your office before long. I'm rather sorry for your other clients."

"My partner can attend to most of them. This is the most important business we've got on hand at present. And quite apart from its importance, is the fact that I'm working for your father's son."

"Not for me?" Pierre's eyes teased him.

"You are your father's son, aren't you?"

"It sounds a little like 'sisters and brothers have I none.'"

Trenchard smiled, but in a moment his face grew grave again. "That's true."

"What's true?"

"The fact that you have no near relatives. You're the last of a family to whom I owe a great deal. Not overdoing it, are you, Peter?"

Pierre shrugged. "You mean my stupid chest?"

"Yes."

"I've become a perfect mollycoddle—looking after myself as carefully as if I were an old woman, or the heir to a throne."

"That's not saying much for you," remarked Trenchard drily. "Old women nowadays—like sailors—don't care, and heirs to thrones apparently take any sporting chance that comes their way. They're not by any means wrapped up in cotton wool."

"Well I am," retorted Peter. "I'm in the hands of the biggest lung specialist in London."

"Are you joking?"

"Far from it. No laughing matter, I assure you. His fees almost make me weep."

"What does he say?"

" Strangely enough I'm better than when he saw me six months ago. The spot on the lung has cleared up. A good healthy out-door life, and I've probably nothing to fear."

" You're likely to live that! "

" Why not? I've reformed. Even here in London I'm sleeping on a balcony. I don't drive my own car, and for the time being I've sworn off gambling. This case is providing me with sufficient excitement without baccarat."

" Not too much, I hope."

" Oh, no. I tell you I'm being very wise. Taking a lot of care of myself. I've got to—till the case is over, anyhow. I feel a sort of responsibility."

" You've been a very good friend to that girl."

" She was a good friend to me. I've told you how she took the car to Bayonne for the doctor that night."

" Yes . . . but all the same . . ." Trenchard hesitated. Well, it might be nothing more than a friendly interest. He hoped it was nothing more. The poor child was more sinned against than sinning certainly, but the right sort of girls—the girls one wanted one's friends to marry—didn't get mixed up in sordid murder cases. He regarded Peter intently for a moment.

Larrialde evidently read his thoughts, for there was a little mocking light in his grey eyes. " Do you spend your time in Lincoln's Inn reading sentimental love stories? " he asked.

" We meet with them occasionally in real life amongst some of our clients, unfortunately," returned Trenchard drily.

" Unfortunately? "

" Unfortunately because we usually see the end of them—in the Divorce Court. Romantic attachments, not founded on real solid affection, have a way of bringing people there you know."

Pierre smiled at him. " I am no sentimental boy,"

he said. "You won't ever be asked to act for me in dissolving an ill-considered marriage."

"I'm glad to hear it." They had turned out of Kingsway into Lincoln's Inn, and now pulled up at Trenchard's office. "Shall I give the man the address in Westminster," asked Trenchard, as he alighted from the taxi.

"Please—if you will."

Trenchard spoke to the driver, and ten minutes later Larrialde reached the block of offices above which was the little flat where Nan and Hilary had lived together. Telling the taxi-man to wait, he got out, and mounted the stairs. Hilary had often talked to him of Nan. He hoped she would be at home. If she wasn't, he would scribble a note on his card asking her to ring him up.

Nan was at home. She it was who opened the door when he rang. He introduced himself as a friend of Hilary's, and told her that Trenchard had informed him of her arrival in England.

"Oh, come in, please," said Nan. "I hope you don't mind an awful muddle. I only got back yesterday, you know."

"So Trenchard said."

Nan ushered him into the little sitting-room. An American trunk stood in one corner half unpacked; frocks were draped here and there on the sofa and chairs; and all the scattered litter of an overturned suitcase was piled on the table.

"I've been trying to unpack," said Nan. "And I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels. I haven't been able to think of anything but Hilary. Is she really in gaol? It's awful! I can't believe it." She swept some clothes off a chair, and Larrialde sat down. "I had one letter from her from Biarritz. And I don't know anything except what I heard yesterday at Mrs. Brown's."

"Mrs. Brown's? "

"Mrs. Brown's Little Teashop in Wardour Street. I

went there to dinner, and met Phil Howard. Lots of the West-End theatre people go there. Hilary always said it was so pretty and restful, and the food's jolly good always."

Nan seemed to be wandering from the point. Larrialde guided her gently back. He had yet to learn that ' good food ' was one of Nan's hobbies. " Was this Phil Howard a friend of Miss Ware's? "

" Oh, he knew her pretty well. He was at the party when she first met Feltman. He told me all that had been in the papers about it—her arrest. But no one seems to know much. I've never seen you before, have I? With Hilary? "

Larrialde shook his head. " No, I've only known her since June. We met in Biarritz."

" Are you Roger? "

" No."

" Then who . . . ? "

" My name is Larrialde—Pierre Larrialde."

" You're French? "

" I suppose most people think of me as French, but my parents were Basque."

" Oh, I see." Nan nodded vaguely. " She told me about Roger. She wrote from Biarritz. Just after she got there. I know she used that ticket I bought from Gina. She joked about it, in the letter—said one of my bargains had ' come in ' at last. They always teased me you know, about bargains."

" Did she tell you why she'd gone to Biarritz? "

Nan looked at him sharply for a moment. " You really are Hilary's friend? Not trying to get something out of me against her? "

" She's my friend—just as she's yours," answered Pierre. " We both want to help her, and we can trust one another. Tell me all you know."

Something in his voice—in his eyes—reassured Nan. She drew a deep breath of relief. " Thank goodness she *has* got friends. Poor old Hilary! I feel . . ." Her

voice shook, and she stopped; but she swallowed hard, and at last went on: "I feel I'm not much use to her, and I'm all in the dark about everything."

"What did she say in her letter?"

"She said she'd been silly going to Feltman's flat, and she'd got a fright and run away from England—just for a week or two. That she'd had a lovely trip, and that she wouldn't go back until Feltman had gone to America. People must be mad to think she killed him. How could she have, when she wrote about him like that? Saying he was going to America?"

"She didn't know he'd been murdered after she left his flat that night. She never looked at any English papers, and only saw about it by chance ten days later."

"And then?"

Larrialde hesitated for a moment. "Then she was frightened—naturally. She felt sure that the real murderer would be discovered very soon, and she thought if she could only hide for a time, the truth would come out, and she wouldn't have anything to fear. I have a house near Biarritz. I was ill. She fetched a doctor for me, and she stayed in my house to . . . to look after me."

Again Nan glanced at him sharply. "Do you mean . . . ?"

"The fact that she was arrested at my house may go against her at the trial. I was to blame for that. People will imagine things of her that are untrue."

"Hilary wasn't . . . wasn't like some girls. She was straight. I'd never believe she was anything else."

"You needn't. But you see if people now mistakenly think her otherwise, I'm to blame. Consequently it's up to me to do my damnedest for her."

"It's up to me, too," said Nan. "I owe her nearly sixty pounds, you know."

"I didn't know."

"No, I suppose you wouldn't. Hilary wouldn't talk about that. Perhaps she never talked about me at all."

" Oh, yes, she did. She's very fond of you."

Nan sniffed violently, and then giving up all pretence, openly produced her pocket handkerchief, and dabbed at her eyes and her nose. " Oh, I know I'm a fool, crying like this," she said defiantly; " but I can't help it. Hilary lent me that money to go out to South Africa to join my husband, Bill. He's still out there. Afterwards she got very hard-up herself—but she didn't bother me. I've managed to save up forty pounds. I'll have to find a room somewhere. Won't bother about paying this rent, and they can have the furniture." She fumbled desperately in her bag. " Here's the money—I'll live on a crust—and pawn everything I've got if it will help Hilary at all."

" You'll do no such thing," said Larrialde. " Put those notes back in your bag. For the present she has no need of them. Everything that can be done, is being done for her."

" But who's paying? " said Nan, bewildered.

" I am. Fortunately I possess more money than I need for my own wants. She'll have the best counsel in London to defend her."

" To defend her? Oh, doesn't that sound awful! " Nan's eyes filled again. " But oh, it's a blessing there *is* someone to do something for her. I've been wondering what on earth was going to happen."

Nan's relief at this was as genuine and as obvious as her distress at the thought that any defence was needed.

" What did you say about rent and furniture? " said Larrialde.

" Well, Hilary and I shared the rent, but she'd got the furniture on the hire system. It was only about half paid for when she went away, and the people came to collect it, but the landlord refused to give them the key to get it. There's been an awful row about it."

" I'll settle that up. Give me the addresses."

" For the furniture—*and* the rent? " Nan goggled

at him, amazed. "You don't mean you're going to . . . to pay for them, do you?"

"Yes, if you don't object. Then you see if you'll stay on here, Hilary will know she has a home and a friend to come to when she's set free, and you won't have to be worried in the meantime."

Nan was almost too dazed by this stroke of good fortune to be able to thank him. Her easily induced optimism now revived. With such a friend, Hilary's innocence couldn't fail to be established! All would be well in a very short time. She was convinced of that. And now, relieved of her most pressing and urgent worries, and reassured as to Hilary, her spirits rose. For the next half-hour she rattled on gaily to Larrialde. Told him of the great success Bill had made in South Africa; that he would be home again now in about three months; that she herself had a very good chance of an engagement in a show to be produced in London shortly; and lastly, she mentioned Gina Gould. Larrialde informed her then, of what Hilary had said with reference to the telephone message—Feltman's exclamation of "Gina!"

"Oh, but of course, it's as clear as daylight!" exclaimed Nan, "Gina did it. I wouldn't put anything past Gina. She's all right, of course, if she likes you, but if she doesn't . . . She'd got angry with Feltman because he was neglecting her. She rang him up to find out if he was in the flat. Then after he answered her, she took a taxi and arrived at the flat just after Hilary had gone. Hilary left the door open. Gina simply walked in, had a row with Feltman, shot him with his own revolver, and walked out again." She turned triumphantly to Peter. "There, you see! Why didn't anyone think of that before?"

"We've all thought of it, but it isn't very easy to prove. First of all, Miss Gould has four or five friends who will swear she was with them from midnight till four a.m., when she went home in a taxi with two of

them. At three a.m. the outer doors of the mansions were closed. She couldn't have got in then unless the porter admitted her."

"She got in before. I've told you she did."

"Her friends swear she was with them."

"Oh, Gina's friends would swear anything."

"But she'd have to enter the mansions without the porter seeing her, and leave again without being seen."

"Gina's quite clever enough to do that."

"Of course it *is* a possibility—but it doesn't sound very probable. Then again, why should she shoot Feltman? What would she gain by killing him?"

"She'd feel she'd paid him out. Gina's spiteful."

"Rather a drastic method of working off one's spite. No, I don't feel at all convinced that she committed the murder, but I believe she may know something about it. At any rate something that might put us on the right track."

"How are we to find that out? She wouldn't be likely to tell me."

"I'm afraid she wouldn't be likely to tell anyone."

"She'll always talk more to a man than to a woman. Does she know you're a friend of Hilary's?"

"I don't think anyone except my solicitor, and one or two people at Bow Street, and Holloway, know that."

"Well, then, you must meet her. Spend a bit of money on her. Don't let her suspect you've ever taken any interest in the case."

"How and where can I meet her?"

"Would you think it worth while to take me out to supper one night?"

"Of course I should," answered Larrialde. "I'd be delighted."

"Well, then, I'll try and find out where she's most often seen, and we'll go there together, and I'll introduce you quite casually. After that you'll have to think out some plan of your own. But Gina's cunning. I don't

think anyone would find out much if she didn't mean them to."

"I can but try." Larrialde rose. "My taxi man will think I'm never coming."

Nan opened her eyes wide in shocked surprise. "You've *never* kept him waiting all this time, have you?" she asked.

"I told him to wait, yes."

It was on the tip of Nan's tongue to say: "You *must* be rich!" Perhaps that would sound rather rude; but his casual disregard of the taxi ticking up threepences in this extravagant fashion really did more to convince her of his wealth and his importance than anything else could have done.

"What am I to call you?" she asked, as they parted. "Mooseer, or Mister Larrialde?"

"What about 'Peter'? My English friends all call me Peter."

"Does Hilary?"

"Yes."

"Then I will too," declared Nan.

And in this fashion was the pact of friendship ratified between Nan Stirling and Pierre Larrialde.

CHAPTER V

THAT evening Pierre strolled down the stairs of the mansions and into the front hall, to talk to Nevill. It was the one-armed porter's week for early duty—from six o'clock to midnight—and this was not the first time he and Pierre had chatted together. Larrialde had begun to believe that the war had not only left its mark of tragedy upon the disabled soldier, but had also in some way been inexplicably tangled with all that this man had known of romance. Some memory there was connected with France, that in retrospect, stirred him deeply. The fact of Pierre's nationality seemed a bond between them. But whatever this romance had been, it had not been one with a happy ending. Of that Larrialde was sure. He was not curious as to what it might be. Nevill's memories were his own; yet the look in the man's eyes when speaking of France, and of the French, was often haunting. Was it only the horror of war that had brought that expression to his face? Pierre had believed at first that it was no more than this. Now he was inclined to reconsider his opinion.

He did not speculate very much, however, on Nevill's past. Whatever had happened to the man in France had at least produced the tangible result of predisposing him in favour of the French. And Pierre was a citizen of France. Nevill no longer obeyed the warning of the police, but talked quite frankly when Pierre questioned him, of Feltman, and of the night of the murder.

Larrialde wished that he himself might be equally frank. He felt that perhaps he was taking a somewhat unfair advantage in concealing from Nevill the fact that he was doing his utmost to clear the girl to whom the porter had spoken that evening. But it seemed wiser, if he wished to discover all there was to learn, not to confess to any special personal interest in the case. He'd already found out from the porter that someone who closely resembled the description he had received of Gina had been a constant visitor at Feltman's flat for a few weeks about three months ago. But for some time prior to the murder he believed her visits had ceased. At any rate, he had never seen her when on duty, and the other night porter hadn't mentioned her. They took the late shift—from midnight to six a.m.—on alternate weeks, and they usually saw anyone who came in frequently, for they were never away from the hall, unless called upstairs for a moment with the lift. That seldom happened except when there was company. There were two bells to the lift. Mr. Larrialde must have seen them. The residents used the automatic bell, but visitors sometimes rang the bell marked ' attendant,' and then the porter on duty went up for them. That was what had happened on the night of the murder.

Larrialde hazarded a guess that after all the girl committed for trial wasn't guilty—that someone else had come in that night—slipped in during the absence of Nevill with the lift.

" But how would the someone get into the flat? " Nevill asked. " The door was shut. Some of the guests from up above came down by the stairs. One of them tried that door—thought it was the street exit. He was a bit muddled certainly, but not muddled enough to make a mistake over that. He pushed at it. It was locked all right. I saw that myself. And the others saw it too. But Feltman was a bad 'un. If that girl used a gun on him he only got what he deserved, and no jury would sentence her."

Pierre was not so sure of that, but he did not voice his doubts. He had up to the present time merely chatted in a casual fashion, as anyone else might do, about the case. To-night he made more definite inquiries. "In her Bow Street statement I believe the girl says she brushed against someone at the outer door."

"I didn't see anyone."

"If you were in your chair here, you wouldn't."

"That's true," admitted Nevill. "But I'd see him directly he entered. I didn't take the lift upstairs for quite two minutes after she left."

"She thinks this man followed her a few yards down the street."

"If he did, of course, I might have just missed seeing him."

"He could have slipped in through the open door into Feltman's flat during that short interval."

"But the door wasn't open."

Pierre did not succeed in getting Nevill to confess that he might be mistaken on this point, so he abandoned it. "She describes the man as sallow, fair, clean-shaven, and thick-set. He peered at her with his head thrust forward. A wide, rather cunning face. Not a very pleasant-looking fellow. About thirty-five. Know any resident of the mansions who answers to that description?"

The porter shook his head. "A bit vague that, isn't it? It might be anybody."

"But everyone living here in these flats isn't about thirty-five, fair, sallow, and thick-set. Let's start with that, and go through the residents. It's as difficult as a crossword puzzle, this mystery." He was smiling—trying to treat the matter lightly—in order to conceal from Nevill his anxiety to find out all he could. Would it be better to make a clean breast of it? Admit his personal interest in the case? The porter and he were on good terms certainly, but the police had already

warned Nevill against giving information to anyone who displayed particular interest in the crime. Better not risk confession until he were more sure of his ground.

" There's Mr. Johnson, Mr. Bower, Mr. Fielding," said the porter slowly. " That sort of description might fit any of them."

" And are they all unpleasant, cunning-looking fellows? "

" Oh, no, I shouldn't say any of them were that."

" Does one of them look at you with his head thrust forward? "

" Mr. Bower was short-sighted, but then he usually wore glasses. He had a wide sort of a face."

" Had? Hasn't he got it still? "

The porter laughed. " I expect so, but he's not here any more."

" Where is he? "

" Abroad somewhere, I believe. He gave up his flat soon after the murder."

" That sounds interesting. Perhaps Mr. Bower *wanted* to get away."

" Oh, I don't think his going had any connection with the case. He wasn't in London at the time. His flat was shut up that week. He was going to move, and his wife was staying with her mother and father at Hampstead. She'd been ill."

" And Bower wasn't staying at Hampstead too? "

" No, he was abroad. Making arrangements for a house or something. All their furniture was shipped out later. He spelt his name ' Bower,' but I fancy it should have been ' Bauer.' " He spelt out the name—Bauer. " Letters came to him addressed like that sometimes."

" A German? "

" I think so—though he didn't own up to it. He had that flat there." The porter jerked his head towards the door on the landing opposite to the flat where the murder had taken place.

" Feltman was a German too, I suppose, wasn't he? "

" American—supposed to be. German Jews his people must have been originally. They didn't discover any relatives."

" Did Bower know Feltman? "

" Not very intimately."

" Mixed up with him in business? "

" Oh, no, I shouldn't think so. Bower was a merchant—an importer. He's still got an office in the city somewhere."

" Did Bower ever visit Feltman at his flat? "

" Only once, as far as I know. Mr. Feltman met him in the hall here one evening—about six or seven weeks before the murder, that would be—and asked him in to have a drink. There were some ladies in the flat."

" Wasn't Mrs. Bower invited? "

" No, she wasn't at home that evening."

" Bower was out on the loose? "

The porter nodded. " That's right," he said.

" Who were the others you mentioned? "

" Mr. Johnson and Mr. Fielding."

" Did they know Feltman? "

" I don't think so."

" Well, it's an intriguing mystery."

" I'm afraid there's not much mystery about it," said Nevill drily.

" You believe the girl did it? "

" There isn't anyone else who could have done it. But she won't come to any harm. They couldn't punish her for putting a bullet into a brute she was afraid of. She'd reason to be afraid, seemingly."

" Yes." Larrialde talked now of something else. But his brain was busy. Nevill evidently didn't believe Hilary's story of having met anyone at the entrance of the flats. Pierre knew that she was speaking the truth. He would like to be sure that the man was Bower; that might lead them to some new and interesting discovery; but if Bower wasn't in fact in London that night, it seemed that it couldn't have been he. At any rate, it

was worth while getting his detective on the track of Mr. Bower—or Bauer. It was worth while finding out the history of this man. Tracing any connection he might have had with Feltman, and proving conclusively his whereabouts on the night of the Feltman murder.

CHAPTER VI

THE next day Peter conferred with Trenchard, and inquiries were set on foot at once.

"We're probably embarking on a wild goose chase," said Trenchard.

"No goose is too wild for us to chase," replied Pierre.

He left Trenchard, to call on Nan. She had just come in, and was preparing for herself an odd midday meal of toasted cheese; but she was delighted to see him, and delighted to accept an invitation to lunch with him at the Savoy. It appeared that Nan had already seen Gina. Had run across her for a few minutes in the Strand that morning.

"I didn't get much chance of talking to her. It was just after rehearsal, and she was hailing a taxi to go off to lunch somewhere; but I did manage to say a word or two about Hilary."

"Yes?" said Larrialde. He was a little doubtful as to Nan's discretion. She meant well, no doubt, but he felt that she might very easily say or do something which would be detrimental to Hilary. He decided not to be too communicative while in Nan's company, but to listen quietly. And this he found was not only wise as far as Hilary's interests were concerned, but also a sure passport to Nan's favour. Nan loved to talk.

"What did you say to Miss Gould about Hilary?" he asked.

"Oh, I just said: 'Isn't it too perfectly awful about poor old Hil?'"

" And Miss Gould said . . . ? "

" Oh, Gina looked black as thunder. She said she thought Hilary was pretty well able to take care of herself. ' You can't take care of yourself much if you're in gaol, can you? ' I said; and Gina said: ' What did she get there for, then? She was a fool, going to Feltman's flat. But if you ask me ' (I hadn't asked her) ' I think Hilary was a dark horse. Prunes and prisms, and butter won't melt in your mouth, and all that, and yet Feltman wasn't the only one of my friends she'd tried to cut me out with—I know that for a fact—so you can't expect me to feel so very sorry for her.' ' Oh, Feltman was a friend of yours, then, was he? ' I said very innocently, and she gave me such a look." Nan stopped for a moment. At this point of the interview something had evidently occurred which she did not recall with any extravagant delight. " Gina got a bit abusive then. I won't repeat all she said. I was awfully afraid a policeman might hear us, and think we were having a row. *I* hadn't lost my temper, but Gina always was a bit—well . . . temperamental. Anyhow, she told me not to be a fool. Said I knew jolly well she'd been a friend of Feltman's, though she'd chucked him long before the murder. And if I was trying to be clever, and connect her up with the crime as some of the . . . the . . ." Nan stopped again. " I needn't use all her adjectives. It takes a bit to shock me, but I really didn't think even Gina could use such language *in the Strand!* "

Pierre laughed. " Omit the embellishments, and let's have the facts. Who was it she said was trying to connect her up with the murder? "

" The police, of course. As to Feltman—weeks before he'd been killed she'd finished with him. She'd felt Hilary was welcome to him. He was a stingy beast, anyhow. A hundred or two was all she'd ever had from him, and he could afford diamonds and a car for Rita Delano. But it was the second man Gina was so down on Hilary for. I couldn't make head or tail of

what she was talking about. Anyhow, after she'd raved on for a bit, she evidently began to think she'd said too much, because she stopped suddenly and said: 'Anyway, they'll let her off. But being in Holloway for a bit won't do her any harm'; and with that, she got into her taxi and drove away."

At the Savoy Nan talked less, for she was much too occupied with the good meal provided for her. Pierre found her more amusing than helpful. The encounter with Gina that morning, he imagined, had entirely destroyed their pre-conceived plan of his casual introduction to Miss Gould. But when he voiced this doubt to Nan she dispelled it. "Oh, Gina won't let any words she's had with me stand in the way if there's a man about—a man she thinks she's going to get something out of. Besides, we didn't really have words. You couldn't call it having 'words' when I didn't have a chance to get one in edgeways. Oh, she'll be sweet enough to you if she thinks you've got money."

Pierre was conscious of a sudden distaste for personal private detective work in connection with Miss Gould. If it were necessary, in order to help the little girl in Holloway, he would go through with it; but he hoped that it might be done by proxy. He did not mention this fact to Nan, however. He saw her into a taxi after lunch, and then walked up to Lincoln's Inn, to Trenchard's office. To the solicitor he repeated the substance of Nan's conversation with Gina.

Trenchard looked rather grave. "Another man!" he said. "Did you know anything of this?"

Pierre shook his head. "Nothing. But I've no doubt if we ask Miss Ware she'll tell us all there is to know."

Still the lawyer's eyes were troubled. "You seem to have great faith in the girl," he said.

Pierre smiled at him. "It's your job to have faith too."

" Of course, but . . . Well, I don't want any more difficulties in the case. Everything that besmirches her character may tell against her, remember."

" Why should her friendships be considered damaging? "

" Oh, talk sense, Peter! " returned Trenchard, a trifle impatiently. " If the jury are made to believe this girl is a . . . a light woman, we're not going to stand nearly so good a chance with them."

" The jury themselves will all be men of blameless lives, I suppose? "

" That's not the point." He looked at Peter fixedly. " Would you feel just the same towards her yourself if you believed her . . . frail? "

" My feelings in the matter aren't of any consequence. But at least I wouldn't be hypocrite enough to set myself up as a censor of morals. If I have faith in anyone—in their intrinsic goodness—the temptations to which they've yielded wouldn't prejudice me against them. How do I know how strong those temptations were? I see someone putting up a good fight to run straight, and I respect them for it. I don't count the number of times they've stumbled—I count all the plucky attempts they make to start again."

Trenchard said nothing, and Pierre went on: " Aren't we making rather a mountain out of a molehill? We have the word of a violently jealous woman—jealous of her lover's purse, apparently, rather than of his affections—that Hilary Ware was flirting with one of her friends. We can ask Miss Ware herself about it."

" You think she'll tell us the truth? "

" I know she will," said Pierre simply.

At Holloway, two days later, they repeated to Hilary Gina's conversation. With bewildered, honest eyes, Hilary regarded them both. " But I didn't know any other man that Gina was interested in," she said. " All my men friends weren't the sort of people Gina would bother about."

"Can't you think of anyone at all?" urged Trenchard.

Hilary shook her head. "No."

"There was a Phil Howard, Miss Stirling mentioned."

"Phil was only a boy—playing a small part at the Imperial. He wouldn't have been getting more than ten pounds a week at the outside. Gina had no time for men like that. And there wasn't anybody . . ." Hilary hesitated . . . "I was flirting with at all. I'd tell you if there had been."

Pierre glanced at Trenchard with a little mocking air of triumph. It was impossible to look into the girl's candid eyes and disbelieve this sober statement.

"Even your twelve self-righteous jurymen, I think, would be convinced," he remarked drily.

Trenchard laughed. "Well, we've got to find out just what Miss Gould thinks she's talking about. I don't suppose she's invented this fairy story. She's got some bee in her bonnet evidently, or she wouldn't have allowed her tongue to run away with her quite so indiscreetly. From all accounts she's a wise young woman—up to a certain point. Her wisdom vanishes when her temper goes."

He and Pierre rose to take their departure. Hilary smiled quite bravely as they left her. The miracle had been a genuine and lasting one. Her courage had not failed.

CHAPTER VII

AUGUST was drawing to a close, and still it seemed that nothing had been accomplished. Trenchard was busy conferring with counsel as to Hilary's defence; Pierre's detective was still trailing the elusive Bower; Nan was rehearsing for a new comedy in London; Gina's revue had been produced; and only Larrialde seemed idle. He took Nan out to lunch and dinner very often; and occasionally to supper, in the hope of meeting Gina, but so far they had been unsuccessful in their search. Nan had been allowed to accompany Trenchard one day to Holloway.

"I think Hilary's awfully changed," she remarked to Pierre afterwards.

"In what way?"

Nan knitted her pretty brows in an attempt to explain. "I don't know. She's more secure, somehow. Funny to say that when she's in gaol. I don't mean secure like that, but in herself. She's got a *deeper* look. As though she understood more, and as though she'd found some sort of strength in herself. Of course, she looks white, and a bit thinner, but that only makes her prettier. She's got a quiet, brave sort of look."

"She *is* brave."

"Yes, I know. I think she always was—deep down. I don't believe the hard, thick-skinned people are the only brave ones, do you?"

"No, I don't."

"I knew a woman once who nearly died of fright

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"She *is* brave."

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"No, I don't."

"I knew a woman once who nearly died of fright

if she saw a mouse, and she couldn't say boo to a goose —though I never know why anyone *wants* to say boo to a goose—but she went through an awful divorce case just to save her two children from their beast of a father."

"Courage takes many forms."

"Well, Hilary has courage; but her brave little smile gave me a pain in my throat. How silly that sounds! All the same it's true. I wanted to cry."

"That wouldn't have helped her much."

"I know. So instead of crying I went on talking the most awful drivel—all about the show I'm rehearsing for—and the people in it. Making silly jokes, and imitating our leading man. Very precious, he is."

"Was she amused?"

"Yes, she laughed. That's what made me feel so awful. I wouldn't have felt half as bad if she'd been weeping and gnashing her teeth and being sorry for herself. She really will get off, won't she?"

"Of course!" answered Pierre lightly.

Would she? Well, no use anticipating disaster. Much better to believe all would be well!

They were having supper at the 'Bruno,' and even the grouse which Nan adored wasn't sufficient to drive from her eyes the anxious, worried look.

Suddenly, however, her face lightened. "There's Gina!" she said. "Look! At that table over there to the right. In the sparkley, flame-coloured dress. Her hair's redder than ever. She gets it tinted that shade. Pays an awful lot for it."

Gina was with a thickset man wearing horn-rimmed glasses. A man whose age was probably midway between the thirties and the forties.

"Let's get up as though we were going to dance. We'll walk past their table. Gina'll want to know who you are, and if she likes your looks she'll be as sweet as sugar to me."

Pierre raised his eyebrows, with a little smiling air of

protest. "If her amiability depends on my appearance, I'm afraid . . ."

"You needn't be," said Nan airily. "You have a way with you."

Pierre bowed. "Thanks, but it may not be the way that will appeal to Miss Gould."

"Oh, you never know," returned Nan, with a non-committal air. "We'll hope for the best. Come along."

Pierre obediently rose. Dancing wasn't included in his contract with Nan, but if this might serve some useful purpose, he was prepared to disregard the specialist's advice. As they came abreast of Gina's table, Nan stopped suddenly.

"Hullo, Gina! Fancy running into you! How's the show going?"

"Marvellous!" Gina's eyes had travelled past Nan, and rested on Pierre. Apparently 'the way' he had was a way she found attractive. It was quite evident that she approved of him. "You're rehearsing for something yourself, aren't you?" she said to Nan, still keeping her eyes on Pierre.

"Yes, for the new show at the Astor."

"Straight play, isn't it?"

"Yes, a comedy."

"You're very superior!"

Nan laughed. "I don't know about that. I've only got a little part, but it's quite good."

"Oh!" Gina obviously wasn't very interested in Nan's new engagement. She was still looking at Peter. "You're not an actor are you?" she asked him abruptly.

"I?" Pierre shrugged his shoulders, smiling at her. "Nothing half so interesting I'm sorry to say."

"Goodness!" said Nan. "Why, Mr. Larrialde owns half Paris. He doesn't have to work."

Peter laughed. "Where do you get your information?" he asked.

" Not from you," she retorted. " But someone told me the other day there was a Larrialde patent for the inside of a motor or something. That you owned the rights, and that it brought in tons of money."

" That isn't owning half Paris."

" Much the same thing."

" You haven't introduced me yet," said Gina. Already her eyes gleamed avariciously.

" I'm sorry. This is Mr. Larrialde—Miss Gould."

Gina turned to the man who was seated beside her. He had not risen from his chair, though Nan stood at his elbow. Peter, looking at his sulky face, dismissed him as an ill-mannered, unpleasant fellow. " You wanted to dance, didn't you? " said Gina. " I'm too tired, but Nan's a good dancer. Now's your chance."

The man mumbled something about not wishing to trouble anyone.

" Oh, it's no trouble to Miss Stirling, is it, Nan? Off you go."

Her tone was one that forbade objection on his part. He rose somewhat unwillingly. Nan, seeing in this arrangement her manœuvre unexpectedly crowned with success, declared herself delighted to be his partner, and they moved away together.

Gina patted the man's empty chair. " Sit down here," she said to Peter. " Have you known Nan long? "

" Not very long," he answered.

What was he to find out from Gina? This rôle of private detective was not at all a congenial one. It savoured too much the work of a spy. Rather a mean sort of occupation. That everything is fair in love and war, is a well-known proverb. But proverbs are often merely the catchwords of expediency, not the expression of truth. Yet his duty was to the girl in Holloway, not to Gina Gould.

" Do you know Nan's husband? " she asked abruptly.

He shook his head. " No, but I hope to meet him

shortly. He's returning to England, you know, in a few weeks' time."

"Is he?" Gina regarded him with a slightly puzzled frown. "Sort of general family benefactor, are you?"

"I don't know about being a benefactor. I've seen a good deal of Miss Stirling lately, because she and I have a mutual friend"—he paused for a moment—"someone you know also—Hilary Ware."

Gina's face darkened. "Hilary Ware!" she echoed sharply. It was evident that the sudden introduction of Hilary's name threw her off her guard. "I suppose you're another of Hilary's victims. Still waters run deep evidently." She laughed a trifle acidly. "I always thought Hilary a bit of a prude. One lives and learns it seems."

"Nan Stirling repeated to me a conversation which she had with you. You said something about a man—an acquaintance of yours—whom you suspected of carrying on some sort of flirtation with Hilary. There isn't any truth in that, you know."

"Isn't there? I'm the best judge, I think, of that. I found a handkerchief marked 'Hilary Ware' in his pocket one day. He denied having any knowledge of the owner. Said he'd picked it up in the street. A very likely story that!"

"But even if he knew her—if he did happen to have something belonging to her in his possession—why should you infer from that very simple fact, any great degree of intimacy between them?"

"I don't infer it from his having the handkerchief, but because he swore he'd never met her, and took the trouble to invent that cock-and-bull story about finding the handkerchief in the street. If he'd owned up that he knew Hilary——"

"But who is this man?"

"He's . . ." Gina stopped suddenly; but as she ceased speaking, her eyes flashed quickly across the room

to Nan and the man dancing with her—the man wearing horn-rimmed glasses. " Never mind who he is. That's nothing to do with it," she went on a little less vehemently. " And anyhow, I don't see that it's anybody's business except mine, and his, and Hilary's. I'll tackle her some day myself about it."

" When? " asked Pierre quietly. " She may serve ten or fifteen years in prison, you know."

" Fifteen years! " There was a quick look of fear in Gina's eyes. " They'd never sentence anyone to that just for firing a revolver at that beast Feltman."

" They may sentence her to more than that, in spite of the fact that she *didn't* fire the revolver."

" What do you mean—didn't fire the revolver? "

" You know as well as I do that Hilary isn't guilty of this crime."

" How do *I* know it? " Gina's eyes were flashing angrily.

" Because you knew *her*. Shall I tell you what her lawyer says? He's made it clear to her that if it were true that she shot the man—if she could plead justifiable homicide—it would probably be far easier to get her off. As it is, the case is full of difficulties for the defence."

" And she won't own up? "

" She's telling the truth when she says she knows nothing of the murder. And believe me, Miss Gould " —his voice was very quiet, and his grey eyes were neither hard nor unfriendly—" she never wished you any harm, or ever wished to steal any of your friends from you—neither Feltman, nor the man over there." He nodded towards Nan and her partner, who were now returning to the table.

" What's he to Hilary? "

" That's what you yourself asked him when you found her handkerchief in his possession, didn't you? "

" Who said that was the man? " asked Gina quickly.

" Your eyes when you declined to give his name."

Nan and the man wearing horn-rimmed glasses approached. Pierre rose.

"Mr. Bower dances most awfully well," said Nan, flushed and beaming.

Peter, as he moved back with Nan to their own table, felt that the evening had not been wasted.

CHAPTER VIII

ON the following morning Pierre visited Trenchard's office. Together they talked over the information Larrialde had succeeded in securing on the previous evening.

"Then this man Bower, is probably Feltman's successor as far as Gina Gould is concerned," said Trenchard. "If he were the person Miss Ware met that night, it's a probability that his story of having picked up the handkerchief in the street is a perfectly genuine explanation of the manner in which it came into his possession. That would tally, too, with Miss Ware's belief that he followed her for a few yards. The dropped handkerchief provided him with an excuse to pursue her. Then he gave up the chase, and re-entered the mansions. During that short interval of time the night porter would have been called upstairs with the lift."

"Yes, that's all right as far as it goes," said Larrialde. "But we've been assured both by the porter and our private inquiry agent that Bower's flat was shut up on the evening in question. He himself was abroad, and his wife was staying out at Hampstead."

"The thing we've got to find out now is whether Bower paid a visit to London that week, a secret visit, which for reasons of his own he didn't want talked about. But I warn you, Peter, don't build too much on what you've already discovered. Gina Gould and Bower may be as innocent as you and I are of the murder. Bower

probably didn't want his wife to know of his friendship for another woman. That would account for his furtive visit to London."

" But why return home if he didn't want his wife to know of the visit? She'd be bound then to discover he'd been in London."

" Yes, that's a puzzling point. Unless . . ."

" Unless he went to the mansions, not to visit his own place at all, but because he wanted to interview Feltman about something."

" Yes, of course. Bower might as easily have entered Feltman's flat that night as his own. That is *if* Miss Ware left the door open. There might be motive too, for the crime—jealousy. But you know, Peter, when one *wants* to be convinced, circumstantial evidence always appears unanswerable. One has to guard against constructing cases in accordance with one's own wishes."

" Well, *someone* killed Feltman, and it wasn't Hilary Ware," replied Larrialde. " We've found something to begin on, anyhow."

Two nights later in his own flat, Pierre received a visit from his inquiry agent. A few facts regarding Bower were now revealed. He was at present living in Berlin. Before moving his establishment there, securing a flat, and getting his wife over, he had spent several weeks in the German capital. He had paid one or two visits to London during that time on business. On two of these occasions he had stayed at Hampstead with his wife's people. But one at least of his trips to England had been taken secretly. Apparently neither his wife nor his business connections in London knew that he had come by air the day Feltman was murdered, going back in the same way next day. He had visited a small flat in Shaftesbury Avenue that day; accompanied the tenant of the flat—Miss Gould—to an address off Tottenham Court Road in the evening; and, presumably, had returned to Shaftesbury Avenue later. Had anything happened at the party he and Gina had attended, to make him

decide to visit Feltman? Was he the sender of the telephone message in reply to which Feltman had exclaimed " Gina! "

Neither the detective, nor Larrialde, could answer those questions.

When his visitor left him, Peter strolled out into the hall to chat again to the night porter; but Ellis, the second man, was on duty there.

" I thought it was Nevill's shift—the six to twelve one —this week? " said Larrialde.

" So it is, sir," replied Ellis; " but we changed over. He's ill—got a touch of 'flu, I believe."

It was still early—only a little after nine—and Peter, with the whole evening on his hands, wondered what he could do with himself. Nan was rehearsing late; he could not again inflict himself on Trenchard, who was busy; and yet his mind was still occupied with the case. He had wanted to ask Nevill again if he had any knowledge at all of the degree of intimacy between the two men—Bower and Feltman; if he believed it were possible for Bower to have slipped into Feltman's flat that night—to reconstruct the crime once more on this hypothesis. Well, why not stroll round to Nevill's lodgings? If the poor chap were ill he might be glad to have a visitor. He knew that Nevill lived alone, and that his lodgings were not far away. The man on duty was not sure of the address, but the head porter would know. The head porter and his wife occupied a small flat in the basement of the mansions. Pierre went down himself, and knocked at their door.

" I think he'd take it as very kind indeed if you was to go round, sir," said the head porter. " He talks a good deal of you—that is a good deal for him—he's not much of a talker as a rule."

So Pierre, having written down the address, set off to walk in the direction of Nevill's lodgings. He found the house in a small back street, noisy with children playing on the pavement. The worried-looking woman who

admitted him, told him that Mr. Nevill's room was on the second floor—the first door on the right at the top of the stairs. Very poorly indeed, Mr. Nevill was. The doctor had been to see him.

Larrialde mounted the dismal, oilcloth-covered stairs, and knocked at the door of Nevill's room. A weak voice bade him enter. He turned the handle and went in. The room though clean, looked very dingy—in the light of one incandescent burner—with its linoleum-covered floor, its faded wallpaper, and its shabby furniture. A small gas stove stood in one corner, and on a camp bed against the wall lay Nevill, grey-faced and unshaven.

This was the home of one of the heroes of the war!

'Nothing should be too good for our fighting men on their return.' Pierre remembered some of the phrases of the newspapers when he was a boy at school!

Well, Nevill probably had a pension, and he had work—he was one of the lucky ones. Yet to Larrialde, the comfortless aspect of this poor room was bitterly ironic. Many other disabled men, he imagined, lived in far worse places—under far worse conditions. That thought didn't bring him much consolation; but from his manner—his cheery greeting of the invalid—no one would have guessed the sharp pang of pity which his heart had known. Perhaps it would have been kinder not to come here. Nevill might be embarrassed at his visit; but having come, he must do his best to put the sick man at his ease. No one could remain for very long self-conscious in Pierre's company; and soon he was aware that Nevill, having recovered from his first slight awkwardness, was genuinely glad to see him. Except for the doctor's visit, the man said, he had been practically alone during the past two days. Of course he was quite able to look after himself, he didn't need anything; there was milk on the table there; he could boil up anything he wanted on the gas stove. But all the same, it was nice to have a chat with someone. Very kind of Mr. Larrialde to call.

Pierre hardly liked to reveal the real object of his visit; so he sat down and talked about other things for a time. Then at last he remarked: "By the way, last night I ran into that man Bower who used to be at the mansions. It appears that he was in London the night that Feltman was murdered, and I believe he was the man the girl accused of the crime says she met in the entrance."

Nevill shook his head. "I don't think that's possible. If he'd stayed that night at his own flat I'd have seen him come in. And one of the other porters would have seen him going out in the morning."

"You don't see everybody who goes in and out, do you?"

"Well, mostly everybody."

Though Nevill tried politely to evince some interest in Larrialde's meeting with Bower, it was quite evident that the murder as a topic of conversation wasn't Pierre's happiest choice. Not fair to bother the man while he was ill; and in any case he'd already told him all he knew about it. So at last, after another ten minutes spent in talking of different matters, Peter rose. On the mantelpiece was a large framed photograph.

"That's a pretty girl," said Pierre.

There was a little pause before Nevill replied. "That was my wife. She was French."

Again Larrialde felt he had perhaps stumbled on to an unfortunate subject. The use of the word 'was' made it apparent that the girl had either left her husband, or was dead.

"A very sweet face," he said.

That was true. Perhaps the original of the photograph had not possessed much strength of character, but she looked gentle and kind. Now he guessed why the fact of his French nationality had interested the night porter.

"No one was ever sweeter," said Nevill; "but she didn't have a fair chance."

Was he anxious to prolong this conversation, Larrialde wondered? Ought he to give the man a lead? Say;

" In what way? " or make some remark of that sort? But as he hesitated, Nevill went on. He wanted to talk about her.

" I married her just before I was knocked out on the Somme. She was only seventeen then, and she was an orphan like me—her father and her brother killed in the war, and her mother dead. All alone she was, poor kid. A pair of strays we were—no one in the world belonging to us." He paused. " Then after the war, we had a hard struggle. Too hard it was for the likes of her—too hard for any girl—pretty, and young, and loving life, and wanting brightness and bit of fun sometimes."

Had she left him, or was she dead? Pierre couldn't put that question, but Nevill answered it without its being spoken.

" She's dead," he said. " At rest. No more suffering for her—poor little Aline."

He had risen on one elbow, and lay down again now, with a deep sigh.

Suddenly Pierre knew the reason of the sadness in the soldier's eyes. Did it ease his pain to talk of her? Larrialde began to think that all along the man had wanted to tell him of his wife—ever since that night when they had first met, and he had said: " French are you, sir? " with the quickened look of interest in his face. Nevill lay with his one hand shading his eyes.

" I was billeted at the mother's house—that was how I met her first. Only sixteen then, she was, and the first girl I'd ever looked at. But she was worth looking at, and she loved me from the first—she always loved me. No one'll ever make me believe different. She told me that before she died—whatever'd been in her life between —between the time she left me, and when she died— I was the only one she loved—she trusted me, she said; but she couldn't come back to me afterwards, because she was too shamed—and so she just died."

" How long ago was that? " asked Pierre gently. The

man did not answer at once, and Larrialde added quickly; " Don't speak of it, if it hurts you."

" It doesn't, it helps. It's having it locked up inside me that hurts. I've never had anyone to talk to—but her. Brought up in a charity orphanage, I was." His voice changed. " I mustn't keep you now, sir. It's getting late."

" Are you all fixed up for the night? Can't I heat some milk for you, or something? "

" Oh, no, sir, I wouldn't trouble you. My landlady looks in last thing. Very kind she is—though of course she's got a lot of work to do, and I can't expect her to give up much time to me. But I don't need any attention. Just got to keep warm and quiet."

" Well, there's the evening paper, and a few grapes I've brought you. I'll call to-morrow."

" You're very good, sir."

Pierre laughed. " Not much goodness required for that. You're sure you're all right now? "

" Quite, sir. My temperature's down to-night."

" That's good. Hope you'll be back again at work soon."

" Thank you, sir. It's only a chill. Not real 'flu the doctor says. I'll be about again in a day or two."

Before he left the house, Pierre interviewed the harassed looking landlady, and handed her some money. " Get Nevill anything he fancies, will you? And perhaps you'd let me have the doctor's address? "

Armed with this he departed. Money at least had its uses. One could make things a trifle easier for those whom life had treated harshly.

CHAPTER IX

THE trial of Hilary Ware began on the 17th September at the Old Bailey, two days after the production of Nan's comedy at the Astor.

A photograph of Bower had been secured, and had been shown to Hilary, who by this had identified him as the man she met at the entrance to the mansions, when in panic she had rushed away from Feltman's flat. But even this identification led the defence nowhere. They could only call Gina and Bower as hostile witnesses. And even if they did so—demanding from them both an explanation of their movements on that night—nothing much might be established by this explanation. Still, it was worth while. It might bring an element of doubt to the jury's mind.

Gina certainly seemed to have established her alibi; and Bower would probably have a perfectly good reason for visiting his own flat that night. Theories as to someone else's connection with the crime couldn't help the accused much in proving her innocence. Still, in the end, both Gina and Bower were subpœnaed.

Bower had been visiting London at an opportune moment.

"He'll hardly dare not to give evidence," said Trenchard. "It would put him in a very queer position indeed if he got out of the country now—especially since Miss Ware can swear to his identity from that photograph. Whether putting him in the witness box is going to do us much good or not, remains to be seen."

It was on a lovely, still September day that the noon newspaper posters flared with large-typed captions.

'ACTRESS ACCUSED OF MURDER AT OLD BAILEY.'
'HILARY WARE—ACTRESS—ON TRIAL FOR MURDER.'
'THE FELTMAN MURDER. LOVELY YOUNG ACTRESS IN THE DOCK.'

And this description of the prisoner was not mere journalese. She *was* young, and she *was* lovely. As she stood up in the dock at the judge's entrance, her wide, wistful eyes travelled from the faces of the jury on her right; past the judge in his red robes directly before her; over the heads of the solicitors at the table; and the robed and white-wigged barristers; searching—searching for a dear familiar face. And as she saw him—Pierre—seated at the back, behind the counsel's benches, she flashed him one bright smile. There was sweetness and courage in that smile. It was as though she sought to reassure him—to tell him that she was no longer a weak and terrified girl, but a woman who could bear with fortitude the outcome of the trial, whatever it might be. They held the look between them for a moment; then Hilary's eyes were veiled with the sweep of her long lashes, and a little warmth of colour painted the clear pallor of her cheeks. She did not glance at Pierre again, but faced the judge.

There was more dignity here, in this small Court Room, than at Bow Street. The judge's face was strong, but kind. Beside him on his desk was a posy of flowers. He told her to be seated, and the trial began.

The counsel for the prosecution outlined the case, but Hilary scarcely listened. Her eyes rested on the little bunch of flowers beside the judge. She didn't know who had placed them there, but she was grateful for them. They seemed to bring a glow of comfort to her soul. 'In the beginning, God made a garden.' A phrase from somewhere repeated itself in her heart. God made a garden! This was the High Court of Justice. Here

men strove to carry out God's law. The judge was swayed by no petty or malicious motives. The little touch of sternness in his face, the kindly eyes behind their horn-rimmed glasses, gave her a feeling of security. Again, as at Bow Street, she prayed for strength, but it was no longer the agonised appeal of utter terror; it was a communion with some power outside herself—a power which one could only find by losing sense of a personal and complete entity. We were all part of one great whole —all one with God.

In opening the case for the Crown, the facts of the case were recapitulated. Hilary's statement at Bow Street had given them all. All but one—the most important—the most vital. She denied firing the revolver. This was the point which Counsel for the Prosecution stressed. He sought to show that her action was the logical outcome of fear. The action of a highly strung, impulsive girl, face to face with an alternative repugnant to herself. He cleverly avoided any detraction of Hilary's character. He too—like Trenchard—realised that if she were proved to be a ' light woman ' the situation in Feltman's flat would have held no terror for her. He dwelt more on the question of motive. There must be motive for that shot. It could hardly be plunder. The wallet found in Feltman's inner pocket contained a further hundred pounds in notes; and the numbers of the notes were in a continued sequence to those notes changed by the prisoner at Bordeaux.

Had she shot Feltman with the idea of robbery, she would have taken all the money. Again, it would have been difficult for her to get at that pocket after he had fallen face downwards on the floor. Nor was it probable that she would have had sufficient self-control, after his death, to have extracted the fifty pounds, left the rest of the money neatly folded in the wallet, and replaced the case in that inner pocket. Plunder, therefore, might be ruled out as the motive for the crime. There remained either anger or fear, as an explanation for her fatal action.

Feltman might have demanded the return of the money, and that might have led to a quarrel. But in any event the case was clear. Feltman had met his death at this girl's hands. Nothing else but abject terror of discovery, could have led to her sudden flight abroad. The prisoner's youth, the character of the man who had so suddenly been hurried to eternity, might all lead the jury to regard the crime with a certain amount of leniency. Justice should be tempered with mercy undoubtedly, but murder was a crime abhorrent to humanity. No considerations such as these—the childish beauty of the accused—the sinister reputation of the victim—should blind the jury to the reality of the terrible seriousness of the offence. A murder was a foul and dreadful deed, transgressing the laws of God, and undermining the whole fabric of society. The wages of sin is death. Whatever pity the jury might feel they must never forget that phrase. This girl had sinned in taking life. Thou shalt do no murder. That commandment was as solemn, as definite, as unanswerable to-day as it was when first put into words for the guidance of mankind.

Witnesses were called for the prosecution. All the evidence of finding the body—evidence given at the Coroner's inquest—was here repeated. The probable time of the murder was fixed by the doctor as about the time of Hilary's visit to the flat. No medical man could swear to within an hour or so, but it was definite enough.

Apparently no one in the mansions had heard the revolver shot, but the flats were practically sound-proof.

The position of the body when found by Feltman's man—Hurst—the day after the murder, was described.

Evidence of Dawson, Feltman's chauffeur, who drove the prisoner and the murdered man home to the flat that night, was taken. Times were fixed—other witnesses examined.

Nevill, the night porter, was called. He it was who had seen the girl enter the mansions; and who ten minutes

later had risen from his chair to say: "Taxi, Miss?" as she rushed past him through the hall, out into the night.

Nevill, sad-eyed and quiet, gave his evidence clearly and well. He was closely questioned as to the time when the outer doors would be shut—the possibility that the prisoner's statement was true with regard to the door of Feltman's flat having been left open. Reluctantly, he was forced to admit that as far as he knew the door was closed. There was, of course, with any human being, the possibility of error. It was just conceivable that he might have been mistaken. The door might have been left ajar for a few seconds; but the other witnesses—those who had descended the stairs almost immediately after Hilary's departure, had proved conclusively that the door was not open then. In the face of this the jury could not fail to believe that the prisoner had closed the door as she left the flat.

"It swung very easily, and closed very quietly, that door," said the porter. He was obviously anxious to do his best for the defence, though called by the prosecution. If the door really had been shut, he seemed to want to prove that the prisoner wasn't necessarily lying about it—she might have believed she had left it open, when in reality it had swung to noiselessly behind her.

But still the defence by close cross-examination of every witness from the mansions, sought to prove that the door had been unlatched. Not much chance of proving this point, however. If the theory that someone else had entered Feltman's flat immediately on Hilary's departure was the sole hope for the defence, it appeared now that this hope was shattered.

The case for the prosecution lasted throughout the whole of that first day. Though undoubtedly circumstantial, the evidence was certainly black against the prisoner. What other solution of the mystery could there be? Not really very much of a mystery. A girl is induced to visit a disreputable character at his own flat. He makes his intentions clear to her. She is there at his mercy, and

realising her own powerlessness, and crazed with fear, she seizes a loaded revolver from a table beside her, and fires —not meaning to kill perhaps—perhaps in that first second not even meaning to fire, but only to intimidate. Yet, the fatal shot is fired. The man is dead at her feet, and in terror she rushes away from the flat—away from the country.

No one in Court that day could have much doubt as to the prisoner's guilt. In all probability she wouldn't get a very heavy sentence—the jury would most likely make a strong recommendation for mercy—but unless the accused's counsel had some very strong trump card up his sleeve, her acquittal was out of the question.

That evening long columns in the Press reported the case. Photographs of Hilary Ware appeared in every paper. Her name was now better known than any star in London.

In opening the case for the defence next morning, Hilary's counsel also outlined the facts connected with the crime. But he sought to throw a somewhat different light upon them. The girl had made a voluntary statement at Bow Street. She had denied nothing, save the one basic contention upon which the whole trial hinged. She did not kill Feltman. Had she admitted this—pleaded justifiable homicide—the case would have been comparatively simple. No jury would convict a girl of murder who fired a shot in self-defence. But she had not put in this plea. Why? Because she was as innocent of this crime as any member of the jury—because she knew as little of how Feltman met his death as they did. Someone shot this man. But when the prisoner escaped from the flat, she would swear that the door was open. The prosecution had endeavoured to show that this was not true, but at least the defence hoped to prove that there was a short interval of time—perhaps only an interval of a few seconds after the accused's departure from the mansions—before the door was definitely proved to be closed. Even those few seconds would be sufficient for

someone to slip through that open door, and to close it behind him—or her.

Again, there was the possibility that someone was already concealed in the flat when Feltman and this girl entered it.

The evidence against the prisoner was highly circumstantial — the most dangerous — the most damnably dangerous—evidence on which to convict any human creature.

A great deal had been made of the girl's flight abroad. Her own explanation of it—her fear of Feltman—was not considered a strong enough inducement to make her take this course. But the jury must remember in listening to the evidence, that the ticket to Bordeaux was there to her hand. It seemed to be a providential solution of her difficulties. If she remained in England, she believed that Feltman might demand the return of his money. He had set up in her mind a 'fear complex,' and her one idea was flight—flight and safety from him, until his departure for America. She had been desperately pushed for money. And the Court would hear later why she was so pushed for money. Because, most generously, she had helped a friend. She was lonely and wretched. The idea of escape to another country brought with it a vision of adventure—a not unpleasant adventure—and safety. In this way she would secure a little breathing space during which she might make her plans for the future. She would reach a sunny, pleasant land, where for a week or two she could forget her worries and her difficulties.

The prisoner had been represented to them as a highly strung and impulsive girl. That was true enough. Would a highly strung, impulsive girl, have sufficient sense and self-control after committing murder to wipe the revolver clear of all finger-prints? The Court had been shown that this was what had undoubtedly happened. Whoever shot Feltman had done this. This pre-supposed a deliberation, and a foresight, quite foreign to a girl highly strung and impulsive. They had already been

told by the learned Counsel for the Crown that it was improbable that the prisoner would have sufficient self-control after the death of her victim to extract money from the wallet. Would she have sufficient self-control to wipe the revolver—to remember to do so? No, it was utterly unlikely. She admitted handling the weapon that night, and she made no objection to having her finger-prints taken when first charged at Bow Street. The idea of connecting her with the crime by the means of finger-prints, had never once occurred to her.

Witnesses for the defence were called. First Hilary herself.

Very pale and quiet she was, and her hand shook a little as she took the oath. But she told her story clearly and well. It was exactly the same as the statement she had made at Bow Street. No cross-examination could trap her into any admission of guilt; nor could counsel force her to agree with the suggestion that she had closed that door. The door was open, and Feltman was alive, and speaking at the telephone when she left the flat.

Obviously her appearance—her clear and candid eyes—her low, sweet voice—made a good impression on the jury.

Then, back in the dock, she watched Nan mount the steps to the witness box. Nan was nervous and flustered. She betrayed far more trepidation than the prisoner herself had shown. But she too, gave her evidence-in-chief well and clearly. She told the story of the ticket; of Hilary's generosity; gave an idea of her friend's character—her loyalty and her kindness.

It was only when the cross-examination began, that Nan went to pieces. She was badgered into all sorts of admissions rather prejudicial to the prisoner. To Trenchard, and Pierre, and the defending counsel, this half-hour was, so far, the worst of the trial.

Yes, Hilary was impulsive. Very impulsive? Well yes, perhaps she was, but she wasn't a bit—well, flighty. She'd face any danger rather than do something dis-

honourable. Of course she wasn't afraid of men. She could hold her own with them. No, she wouldn't be likely to submit tamely to any insult. Yes, she might fire a revolver without thinking what she was doing, but she hadn't shot Feltman, though he certainly deserved to be shot.

Even the judge lost patience at last. "Please answer the question. Don't give your opinion on any subject unless you are asked for it."

Nan was on the verge of tears when she left the box. Her evidence—which was so well meant—had probably done more harm than good.

"Call Roger Birkett."

For the first time Hilary seemed to flinch.

Roger in the witness box! Roger avoiding any glance in her direction, but giving his evidence in a good, honest fashion.

Hilary closed her eyes. Back on the boat deck in the shadow of the awning they were again, with the blue sea round them, and the blue sky overhead. They were talking of Anna Christie, and she could hear herself saying: "I think I've been, perhaps, worse than Anna. Doing shabby things. Wanting a good time, and sacrificing my own self-respect to get it." And then: "The sea's made me different."

They were walking along the busy, cobbled Bordeaux streets in the sunshine, laughing and arguing; sitting in the train going to Biarritz, with the rain beating on the carriage windows; standing up on the grassy ramparts of old Bayonne, with the warm wind moving in the elm trees. Was this all a dreadful dream—all that had happened since? No, not a dream, reality.

Roger was telling the Court of their voyage. Her gaiety—not the manner of a fugitive from justice—a happy, light-hearted girl. And then the meeting outside the village of Arvray. She could hear—above the sound of Roger's steady voice—the bird singing in the beech tree.

"I'd been sketching among the Basque villages. She

was staying then near Arvray." Roger hesitated for a moment. "She'd come out there—away from Biarritz—because she was afraid. She had only just seen in the paper the news of the murder."

"Did she deny any knowledge of it?"

"Yes."

"You believed her?"

"Absolutely. I'm certain she was speaking the truth. Her only idea was to remain hidden for a time until the real murderer was discovered."

Unlike Nan, Roger remained unshaken in cross-examination.

His evidence had helped her.

Her eyes followed him as he left the Court, but still he did not glance in her direction.

"Call Georgina Gould!"

Gina in the witness box. Gina in a daringly smart suit, and close-fitting hat, under which gleamed a tiny streak of red, the brilliant red of hennaed hair.

In spite of her clever make-up, Gina's pretty face showed white and strained; until later, she flushed a dull scarlet as she answered counsel's questions. Her story of the ticket corroborated Nan's evidence. This part of her examination disturbed her very little. It was only when she was asked to give an account of her movements on the night of the murder, that the scarlet mounted to her cheeks.

"You're not accusing me of killing him, are you?" she flashed out suddenly.

The judge rebuked her sharply; but there followed then an argument as to the relevancy of counsel's questions. The relevancy of this witness's evidence altogether. It was an objection for which counsel for the defence was prepared. The telephone message to Feltman was in question. The Court allowed the examination to continue.

By dint of many indirect queries, this information was at last elicited. Although to the police, Gina had denied

sending that message, she now admitted that she had done so. She had quarrelled with a friend at the party which she had attended, and had 'phoned to Feltman from that flat, just to annoy this friend. They were together in the little dining-room at the flat where the 'phone was. The rest of the party were in the drawing-room. No, no one else had known of the 'phone call. Only the friend who was with her. Why had she concealed this fact previously? Because she didn't want to be connected with the case in any way at all. She didn't know, any more than the man in the moon, who'd killed Feltman, but she didn't want to be dragged into the case, even indirectly. What was the name of the friend?

What had this question got to do with the present case, asked the judge impatiently? Gina was told she needn't answer that question. But Gina apparently had now lost her temper. And for some private reason of her own, didn't seem to mind what she said on this subject. "His name was Bower, and he had a flat in the same block of buildings as Feltman."

"Call Adolph Bower."

The man in the horn-rimmed glasses took Gina's place in the witness box; and now the crowded Court listened with still keener attention. There was a wordy duel between counsel. This evidence was utterly irrelevant to the present trial. No, in a case of this importance—a case where all the evidence was highly supposititious—the defence surely had the right of exhausting every avenue of inquiry.

The Court allowed the examination to continue.

At last from Mr. Bower himself, a good deal of information was extracted. Bower had quarrelled with Miss Gould, and Feltman's name was not unconnected with the quarrel. Bower lived in the same block of buildings as Feltman. He had been in London that night, and had quarrelled with Miss Gould. He had left the flat off Tottenham Court Road afterwards, intending to spend the night at a friend's flat.

What friend?

That question was disallowed.

When he reached the flat in question, he discovered that as he had no latch-key, and the—the owner of the flat—was absent, he could not gain admittance. He had changed there previously into evening dress. Not a very pleasant predicament. To be forced to go to an hotel in evening dress, and have no clothes into which to change in the morning. He had decided then to go back to his own flat—which was closed temporarily, but for which he had the key on his key-ring—sleep there, and procure a morning suit from his own wardrobe. As he was about to enter the flats, a girl, whom he now recognised as the prisoner, came rushing out. She brushed past him, and he stepped back. Then he noticed a dropped handkerchief on the pavement. He picked it up, and followed the girl a few yards along the street, in order to restore to her the lost property. He did not overtake her, however. He turned back towards the mansions. There was no one in the hall as he entered his own flat. Nor did he see anyone when he left next morning.

If only the defence had been able to establish the fact that the door of Feltman's flat was not closed, it would be obvious to the jury, that here, on his own showing, was an opportunity for Bower to slip through the murdered man's front door. But if the door was shut, this was an impossibility. All the flats were fitted with Yale locks —no two keys were alike—and from the evidence given earlier in the case, it seemed proved without a doubt that Hilary had either been mistaken in imagining the door was open, or that she was not speaking the truth.

By putting Gina and Bower in the witness box the defence could only hope that they had accomplished their object of implanting a doubt in the mind of the jury. They had certainly accomplished nothing more, and they had not succeeded in establishing Hilary's innocence. Had the prosecution succeeded in proving her guilty?

That remained to be seen.

CHAPTER X

NEXT day, before a Court crowded to suffocation, Counsel for the Prosecution began his address to the jury.

Hilary sat very quietly beside the warders in the dock. Pierre occupied a seat again behind the counsel's benches.

How was the case going? No one could tell.

A little movement at the doorway attracted Larrialde's attention. Someone was beckoning to him. He moved out, past the occupants of the seat, towards the door. Nevill was standing outside. Nevill, not in his porter's uniform, but in a shabby brown suit, now rather soiled and torn. The man's face was white, and there was a smear of blood across his cheek.

"What's up, Nevill?" asked Pierre. "Hurt yourself?"

"I got knocked down," replied Nevill. "I was hurrying down here because I'd something to tell the Court, and there was a bit of a mix-up . . ."

A man beside the porter spoke up. "He just saved a child from being run over. Got knocked down himself, and knocked out it seems to me. The policeman wanted to send for an ambulance, but he wouldn't hear of it. He asked me to come along here with him in a taxi."

"I'm all right," said Nevill quickly. "I had to get here. I've got to give evidence."

Pierre looked at him rather pityingly. The shock of the fall had apparently confused him. "But you've already given your evidence."

" Oh, that——" Nevill dismissed it with a wave of his one arm. " It's something else I've got to say. Something urgent. Something that'll save her. But I've got to say it on oath."

For a moment Pierre regarded him doubtfully. Was the poor chap quite right in his head?

" Oh, for God's sake don't delay! " said Nevill suddenly.

His tone decided Pierre. He slipped back into the Court and touched Trenchard on the arm. A hurried whispering followed, and Trenchard moved swiftly across to counsel. The speech for the prosecution stopped abruptly, as Hilary's counsel rose. The judge looked down.

In a few words the matter was explained. A previous witness was anxious to be sworn again. He had information of the most vital importance.

Arguments and discussion followed. Time was passing.

Pierre was consumed with a furious impatience. Why all this palaver if Nevill really had some urgent and illuminating evidence to give? " Something that'll save her," he had said. It couldn't be a delusion induced by his accident, because he'd set out from home to tell them this. He was on his way to the Court—hurrying—when the accident occurred.

At last the Court decided. The witness should be heard.

" Call Richard William Nevill."

Nevill came through the court and up into the witness box. The judge looked rather curiously at his bloodstained face.

" I'm sorry, my lord," said Nevill; " to be like this. I was hurrying. Got knocked down by a 'bus."

The judge nodded.

Nevill held the Book high in the air. " I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give to the Court . . . shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

In the wounded face the sad eyes burned with some fire,

either of bodily or mental anguish. "Both perhaps," thought Pierre suddenly.

"You have something of importance to tell the Court?"

Nevill held fast to the front of the witness box with his one hand. "Yes," he said. "I killed Feltman."

The judge looked at him sternly. "You're making that statement on oath?"

"On oath, my lord. And if I may, I'd like to tell you and the jury, and the poor young lady there who I've let suffer for my fault, how it came about."

"Go on," said the judge.

The Court was deadly still. No one moved.

"My wife was a French girl. We were married just before—before I—lost this." He touched his empty sleeve. "We had a bad time after the war—lived in one little room. I couldn't get work. A hard struggle it was just to keep alive. Then when I got that job at the mansions, she did sewing sometimes—mending and such-like for the gentleman. She did it for Feltman. Two years ago she left me. Ran away. She was tired of poverty, she said, and I'd be better off without her. She said she'd got a chance to go on the stage. I never heard no more of her until the day . . . the day that Feltman died. She sent for me. She was dying in a hospital. There'd been a man—there in the flats—someone—that was what sent her wrong—she wouldn't tell his name. She died in my arms. I went on duty that night, and I was dazed like with grief. You see I'd always—loved her. The man—I'd got to find that man. Tell him to his face the blackguard and murderer he'd been. Then out of Feltman's flat came that young lady, running. And then I knew who was the man. Quick as lightning I slipped into his flat and closed the door behind me. He was still at the 'phone. He put down the receiver and faced me, and I told him that I knew who'd . . . who'd stole my wife. And he said something of her—something that roused a passion in me to

kill him—the swine—the . . ." he broke off. "I'm sorry, my lord." He was speaking with difficulty, his breath coming in great gasps.

The judge nodded. "Go on."

"The revolver was on the table. I didn't even know it was loaded. I picked it up, and fired, and he fell—dead. I wiped the revolver under my empty sleeve, and dropped it. No one was in the hall when I came out and closed the door. Then the lift bell went, and I took the lift upstairs."

"How long were you in Feltman's flat?"

"Not more than a minute, I believe. It all happened in a flash."

"And you stayed there—at the mansions—on duty?"

"I've been there ever since."

"Letting someone else suffer for your crime?"

"Yes." His voice grew more broken. "That's bad, I know. Cowardly. But I never thought the case would go against her. 'Just a little longer,' I kept saying to myself. 'Just a little longer.' But I haven't slept for the last two nights. Hard to give yourself up to the hangman, my lord, hard but—I've done it now." He was still holding to the front of the witness box. His face was ghastly, and his breathing laboured and painful.

"The jury have heard this man's evidence on oath. It is for them to say if they believe it true. If so, there can be no case against the prisoner there in the dock."

There was a hurried whispering amongst the jurymen and the three jurywomen. The foreman of the jury rose. "We have heard the statement of the last witness, my lord, and we believe that it is true."

The judge looked at Hilary. "The prisoner is discharged," he said.

Already the police officials had surrounded Nevill.

The trial of Hilary Ware was over.

CHAPTER XI

AT one of the side entrances of the Old Bailey, Hilary, Nan, Pierre, and Trenchard, made their way through a small group of people, towards a big saloon car drawn up at the edge of the pavement. The main body of the people had waited at another door to see the released prisoner come out. Only a few lucky ones had happened to hit upon this exit. Press men struggled to get near to Hilary, but Trenchard headed them off; and in a few seconds the four of them were in the car, and moving rapidly away, down towards the Strand. Avoiding the traffic of the main thoroughfares, they moved swiftly, and soon felt that they were beyond pursuit.

"We're out of that, at any rate," said Pierre, smiling. "Where to now, Trenchard?"

"I think we'd better go by a roundabout way to Lincoln's Inn, and drop me at my office. Miss Ware's flat will be surrounded by reporters, most likely. I'd advise you to take Miss Stirling and Miss Ware out into the country for a few hours, Peter."

"Would you like a drive?" Pierre looked at Hilary.

She nodded. She was still a little dazed at this abrupt termination of her ordeal—by the avalanche of congratulations she had received from counsel, and from friends who had pressed upon her after the judge's words: "The prisoner is discharged."

It was over. She was free. What was she to do with her freedom?

"Hilary'll have to be interviewed, won't she?" objected Nan. A thousand pities to miss such wonderful publicity, she thought. And Nan Stirling—the friend of Hilary Ware—might come in for a little share of the limelight too. Always useful that to an actress! Wicked to waste such a chance! Nan's habit of thrift was asserting itself.

"She'll have all the interviewing she can do with later," said Pierre. "Let her get her breath for a minute first. You'll be kept busy enough yourself later on, answering congratulatory letters and wires, and warding off the reporters."

Well, if it was only to be postponed, it didn't matter, thought Nan. Her face brightened. "I'd love a day in the country," she said. "I haven't got to be at the theatre till half-past eight."

"Then suppose you two go off. There's a very good little inn at Amberley, beyond Gerrard's Cross, where you can get lunch. No one would think of looking for you there. I can telephone to you if anything important transpires."

"You're not coming with us?" Hilary lifted her eyes for one moment to his face.

He shook his head, smiling at her kindly. "I've got a thousand things to see to," he answered. "But if Miss Stirling takes you out into the country, and then back with her to the theatre I'll call for you both after the show, if I may, and perhaps you'd give me some supper at the flat."

"Rather!" said Nan. She'd have preferred a jolly party at some restaurant or a dance club, but she had sense enough to realise that to be seen 'celebrating' the same evening that one has escaped from the shadow of the gallows, wouldn't be altogether seemly. At any rate it wouldn't look well in the interviews. Far better this modest shrinking from publicity. That would make the unsought advertisement all the more valuable when it came!

Already in her mind she was planning her campaign. She'd telephone from Amberley, and ask the stage-manager if she could have a dressing-room to herself this evening. "I'm bringing Hilary Ware down with me to the theatre, if you don't mind. Poor darling, she's dodging all the army of press photographers and reporters. We've run away to-day, down to Amberley. Oh, yes, I'll be back in lots of time for the show. I want you to meet Hilary to-night. She's the sweetest thing!"

Something of that sort she'd say. Freddie Wharton, the stage-manager, was a dear. He'd give up his own room if necessary for them, she knew. But anyhow, there was one vacant room upstairs. That would be all right. All the company would be agog to meet Hilary. They'd been terribly excited over the trial.

The car circled and doubled, and was now moving along the Strand towards Kingsway.

"Could I stop at a post office?" asked Hilary. "I want to send a cable—home."

The car pulled up midway between the Strand and Holborn. Hilary laid her hand on the door, and then drew it back again. "It doesn't matter. I'd forgotten. I haven't any money."

Both Trenchard and Pierre's hands went to their trouser pockets, but Nan was before them. She dived into her bag. "There's four pounds!" she said triumphantly. "First instalment of the fifty-seven I owe you." Hilary smiled at her. 'What a sad little smile,' thought Nan, with a sudden pang. 'Poor old Hilary! She's been through an awful time. I'll have to try and make it up to her.'

"Want me to come in with you?" she asked aloud.

Hilary shook her head. "I won't be a minute," she said. She got out of the car, and went into the post office. From a taxi which had just pulled up behind them a young man emerged. He, too, went into the post office. Hilary asked for a cable form. She was

directed to a side desk. "Mother darling everything's all right. I am free—well——" she hesitated for a moment over the last word, and then wrote: "happy."

As she paid for the cable, the young man who had followed her raised his hat. "Excuse me, Miss Ware," he said. "I represent the *Mercury*. Could you give me a few words for our paper?"

"Oh, no, I couldn't," said Hilary hurriedly. "I was only sending a message to my mother." She dodged past him back to the car. He waited a moment to cast a roving eye over the address of the cable, and by the time he gained the street again, the car containing Hilary had disappeared. But of all the papers issued in London that night, only the *Mercury* had a special interview with Hilary Ware.

'Released actress's first thought. A cabled message of love to her mother in Australia.'

CHAPTER XII

HILARY said very little as the car made its way along through the tangle of traffic on Hammersmith Broadway, towards the country. Pierre had got out with Trenchard at the lawyer's office in Lincoln's Inn. She would see him to-night. Until then she wouldn't think of the future. But Nan was thinking of it—talking of it.

"This case is going to be the making of you, Hilary," she said. "You'll have heaps of engagements offered to you now. You stick out for a big salary. Don't you take less than fifty pounds a week, at least. Mr. Trenchard said he'd ring me up at lunch time, if anything important came along; but, of course, you won't want to settle any business until to-morrow. I suppose we'd better stay on at the flat? At any rate, till Bill comes back. Unless, of course, you want something grander."

"Oh, no." Hilary hesitated for a moment. "What happened about the flat? There was money owing."

"Peter fixed all that up. He said you'd feel you had a home to come to when they let you go. He's a dear, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Hilary.

"And you know, what's so wonderful about him is that he's just a friend. I mean, lots of men do things

for girls if they're in love with them, but I never met anyone before who'd do all that just out of friendship. I've thought a lot more of men since I met Peter."

Hilary forced a smile. "Better not let Bill hear you say that."

"Oh, Bill wouldn't mind. He'd know Peter was just a pal. Anyone can tell Peter isn't a bit sentimental. He's not the sort that falls in love. But I think he's very fond of you. He told me how good you'd been to him when he was ill, and he's grateful. Still, there aren't many men who would bother to do so much for anyone just out of gratitude. Mr. Trenchard says he's like that."

"Like what?"

"Oh, puts himself out for people who are in trouble. He's going to try and see that poor man Nevill to-day."

"How do you know?"

"He and Mr. Trenchard were talking about it while you were in the post office. And he's got a lot of other things to see about, because he's going back to Biarritz to-morrow."

Hilary sat very still in the corner of the car. Her eyes rested on the lovely woods, flecked here and there with yellow; the cottage gardens filled with mauve and purple Michaelmas daisies, dahlias, and chrysanthemums —all the browns and reds and yellows of early autumn. The day was peaceful and serene. No wind stirred in the trees, and the warm sunshine flooded fields and woodland.

Courage! It wasn't only needed to face trial and imprisonment. It was needed to face life. Well, she wouldn't fail. Even if one's lovely half-glimpsed castle in the air came tumbling down in ruins—if foolish dreams of happiness were over—one could still be brave. The world was beautiful. It was hers to enjoy. There were many things that still were hers. Friendships; the

interest of her work; beauty; the wide blue sky, the sunshine, and 'the wind on the heath.' Soon she would learn that peace can come again, even if joy is absent. She would not be a coward. She would face life with a smile; and some day the stupid pain in her heart would cease.

At Amberley they had lunch in the little inn parlour, looking out over the village green. Then Nan was called to the telephone. She returned full of excitement. "Mr. Trenchard says that Phillip Keswick has been round to see him, asking for your address. He's coming to the theatre to-night."

"Who is?"

"Phillip Keswick. You know, he's the young author who wrote 'Pamela in Arcady,' and 'The Summit.' He's putting on a new play. Wants to talk to you about it. He saw you in the Court, and says he remembers you in 'Outward Bound' in that stock season of Fordham's. Now, don't forget—you stick out for fifty pounds a week. Mr. Trenchard says there are heaps of letters and telegrams for you. He's sending them round to the theatre to-night. There'll probably be other offers for you, but you take my tip, and accept an engagement with Keswick if he wants you. He's *the* author at present. Everybody talks about his plays."

In the quiet little parlour, with its horsehair-covered chairs, and glass cases of stuffed fish and birds, Nan chattered on.

Later, she and Hilary strolled out into the afternoon sunshine, past the village green with its round pond on which ducks paddled lazily, to the woods. Then after tea, in the light of the glorious rose-pink sunset, they motored back to London, and reached the stage door of the Astor.

Yes, the stage door-keeper told Nan, there was a special room fixed up for her—No. 8. He eyed Hilary curiously, and returned her smile with: "Congratulations, Miss Ware!"

In Nan's new room a sort of miniature reception was held. All the company wanted to meet Hilary. Nan was enjoying a vicarious triumph. There was a bottle of whisky, and siphons of soda. Everyone had to 'have a spot' to celebrate the sensational termination of the Hilary Ware Case. Every member of the company paid a visit to No. 8; and Hilary, after being introduced to them, smiled and laughed with them all. She wasn't hilariously gay, but no one expected her to be that. The queerly pathetic wistfulness of her face only gave her an added attraction in their eyes. And not only in their eyes, but in the eyes of Phillip Keswick, who called during the evening to see her. He was prepared to talk business at once. "I saw you, and heard you, in the witness box," he said. He had a trick of throwing back his head, shaking the long lock of black hair which fell over his forehead, out of his eyes. A dark, interesting face. A young man very much in earnest. "I remember you in 'Outward Bound.' I was at Moreland Bay for a holiday, when you were playing there. I thought you showed promise. You've played in revue since, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Hilary.

"Well, that's jolly good experience, but of course this part wants something very different from what's needed for revue work. It wants sympathy and emotional power. You're ideally suited to it as far as appearance goes. If you can *feel* it. . . . There's something in the quality of your voice that suggests feeling. Understand, I shouldn't be engaging you because of the publicity at present attaching to your name."

"But that wouldn't do any new production harm at the moment, would it?" answered Hilary, with a little touch of dryness in her voice. However much this young man might deceive himself, she knew that it wouldn't have occurred to him to offer her the leading part in his new play, if she hadn't been brought so prominently before the public during the past few weeks

—and especially during the past few days. Still, to do him justice, she didn't believe that he would give her the part unless he was sure she could play it.

"That's the difficulty for an author," he said. "To get someone who has the appearance, and the personality, and the experience, to fit the part. If a girl looks it, she probably can't play it; and vice versa."

In the end it was agreed that she should take the play home, and look at it; and if she liked the part, and wanted the engagement—yes, his backers might go to forty or fifty pounds a week—she should read the part over to him next day. "We're starting rehearsals immediately, and we've been searching everywhere for the right girl. Of course the man's part is the star part —Hilton Owen is playing that—but to me the girl's part is vitally important."

They had been having their business discussion alone in the dressing-room, during the second act, while Nan was on the stage. Now she returned, and Phillip Keswick took his departure, while Nan changed for the third act.

Hilary had been working her way through the sheaves of telegrams and letters sent round by Trenchard. There were more at the theatre, addressed to Hilary, care of Miss Stirling. Before the call-boy knocked at Nan's door: "Five minutes, Miss Stirling, please!" Nan had been engaged in reading some of these effusions. Many were from friends, but most of them were from total strangers.

Nan was enormously delighted to have such a large mail—or someone else's—to peruse. "My dear! Here's the second proposal. He works in a mill in Leeds. Sends his photograph, poor darling." She opened another. "Oh, but Hilary . . ." Nan stopped, gasping. "You haven't seen *this!*"

"What?" asked Hilary, glancing over her shoulder.

"This!" Nan flourished a note written on thick, club paper.

"No. What is it?"

"It's from Lord Brydon. You know—the man who married that American chorus girl and then divorced her. He's rolling in money."

"Does he want to marry and divorce me?" asked Hilary.

"He wants to *marry* you, anyhow!" announced Nan, in awe-stricken tones.

"Oh, how absurd," said Hilary shortly. She seized the note, glanced at it, and tore it in half.

"Hilary!" Nan's face was a study. "Whatever have you done?"

At that Hilary had to laugh. "Don't be such an old donkey, Nan."

Nan was already struggling to put the torn pieces together again.

"Miss Stirling, please," shouted the call-boy peremptorily.

"I must fly. Where are my gloves? Don't you go tearing up any more letters before I get back. Promise."

"I promise," said Hilary, laughing.

Nan dashed off, and a few minutes later the stage door-keeper knocked. "Gentleman to see you, Miss Ware, name of Larald."

"I suppose it's all right," said Hilary. "I mean, Mr. Wharton won't mind his coming up?"

"Mr. Wharton told me I was to bring up anyone you wanted to see. This gentleman seems to think you're expecting him."

"Yes, I am."

"I'll bring him along then."

The stage door-keeper departed, and in a moment re-appeared with Pierre.

"All alone?" he said, looking round.

"Yes, Nan's on the stage. She'll be off directly, and she doesn't wait for the call. As soon as she's changed we're going home." She had placed a chair for him, and

he sat down. Very tired and sad he looked, she thought. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"I've just come from Brixton prison. That poor chap's dead."

"The man—Nevill?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how dreadful. No, I suppose it isn't—it's——"

"It's a blessing really, I imagine. The Governor gave me permission to see him in the prison hospital. He'd been asking for me, and they knew he was dying. He was terribly smashed up in that accident he had this morning. Internal injuries, the doctor said. He wanted me to ask you to forgive him. I told him I knew you would."

"Of course I do."

"Sounds very easy to be noble, and come forward and own up to things, and take what's coming to you, doesn't it, in theory? Damned hard in reality though."

"Yes, it is."

He paused a minute, and then gave a little sad shrug. "One of the evening papers had a heading: 'Heroic One-armed Soldier. Risks his Life to Save a Child.' The bus went half over him. I don't know how he stood up in Court. In another column of the paper they had: 'Murderer Confesses.' He was a hero and a murderer, both on the same page." He raised his head, and tried to smile at her. "Well, we mustn't be too depressing to-night. This should be a night of rejoicing. Lots of letters, I see."

"Yes."

"I had a telegram from Mrs. Marshall, asking me to give you love from herself, and Bob, and John, and congratulations on the result."

"How did she know about it?"

"She asked me to wire. She's fond of you, you know."

"That's nice of her." Hilary paused for a moment.

" How can I ever thank you for all you've done for me? " she asked.

Nan suddenly threw open the door. " Hullo, Peter! I'll be ready in two ticks. You'll have to get out while I change."

" Very well. I'll wait in the car." He went out, and Mason, Nan's dresser, entered.

" Mason, you've got that chicken, and the wine, all ready? "

" Yes, miss."

Nan turned to Hilary. " There wasn't much in the flat for supper, so I told Mason to get something. Put the things in the car, Mason. I'll manage to get out of my frock myself." Mason went off laden with parcels, and in less than five minutes Nan was ready for the car. " I'll take my make-up off at home," she said. Nan always left her make-up on as long as possible. She fancied herself in her stage make-up.

At the flat she bustled about preparing an enormous feast; but in spite of her hilarity, it wasn't a very lively party. No one ate anything much, except Nan. She was as usual ' starving! ' " Nothing like acting to make you hungry."

" *Not* acting makes you hungrier sometimes," said Hilary, with a little grimace.

" Wondering if you can afford an egg for breakfast? " grinned Nan. " Well, that's all over for you, anyhow. She's had three offers already, Peter," she went on. " And she's going to read a part—lead, if you please—in Keswick's new play—to-morrow morning."

" Splendid! " said Peter, smiling.

" He may hate me in it."

" Of course he won't. And those aren't the only sort of offers she's had." Nan was delighted to have so much news to impart. " Three proposals so far. One from a lord—a very rich lord, too! "

" And one from a Welsh miner, and another from a mill-hand in Leeds," said Hilary, trying to laugh.

Nan was having her third helping of chicken and mayonnaise. Would she never go to bed and leave them just for a moment alone together?

What did it matter though? Peter had nothing that he wished to say to her, apparently. He was discussing his return to Biarritz next day. He asked Hilary if she had any message for Mrs. Marshall.

"Give her my love."

"You know one thing Hilary's silly over," said Nan. "Three papers have written offering her hundreds to write up her experiences—tell the story of her life—for them."

"And she won't do it?"

"No, she won't," said Hilary decidedly.

"She's quite right," said Peter. "Her life's her own."

Her own! Yes, that was it. No one else—except the newspaper readers—wanted to share it.

Hilary was still smiling. Even when Pierre rose to go, without waiting for Nan to leave them alone together. "I must be off."

"When are we going to see you again?" asked Nan. "You've become a habit, you know. We can't do without you altogether."

"Oh, I'll turn up again sooner or later." He held out his hand to Hilary. "Good-bye. Take care of yourself." They were both smiling—quite naturally—in quite a friendly fashion. All that had been between them seemed as nothing now. All that had been between them? What was it? A kindly interest, a good friendship. That ought to be enough. Friendship was a beautiful word. No, it wasn't—not when one wanted love. All this stupid talk about success on the stage—what was fame or anything else worth to her? Oh, Peter! Peter! don't go without one word of love to me. It isn't just the sentimental fancy of a girl—it's love—real love. I can't live without you. I can't—I can't. Didn't he know her heart was crying out like this to him? No,

apparently he was merely taking leave of a friend in an ordinary, unemotional way.

Courage! Hilary smiled. She was perhaps braver as she smiled and said good-bye to Peter, good-bye to happiness, than she had ever been before.

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER reading the part to Keswick next morning, Hilary signed her contract. Only for forty pounds a week. Keswick assured her that the backers had discussed the matter, and wouldn't give her more.

Nan, of course, grumbled a good deal at her. "They'd have given fifty if you'd stuck to your guns," she said.

Hilary was by no means so sure, and in any case, in spite of Nan's optimism, it was far the best offer she had received. The others were for music hall sketches and revues. This was the only 'straight' play in which she'd been offered a part. It was lead, and it was in a play likely to be talked about.

During the four weeks' rehearsals Hilary heard nothing of Pierre. He had apparently gone out of her life for ever.

The work of rehearsing—buying clothes for herself, and being fitted for her stage frocks—all the small worries of a new production—kept her mind occupied, and saved her from the misery of thinking. She was not going to allow herself to think. Thousands of men and women in the past had been forced to accept the inevitable—to realise that their love would never be returned. Thousands more in the future would have to face that fact. She was only one of many. Luckier than most, she had work to do which ninety-nine women out of every hundred envied her.

Still the dreadful ache of loneliness within her heart

persisted. Time would cure it, she supposed. No one had ever really died of a broken heart.

Rehearsals, and the two dress rehearsals were over, and the first night came. Hilary, sitting in No. 2 dressing-room, making up before her mirror, felt nervous, anxious, and excited, but not dismayed. She would do her best, and she knew that even though she was inexperienced, she was ' all right ' in this part. She wouldn't do the play any harm; and for herself, personal success or failure seemed of not such vital importance now.

There were over a hundred telegrams and letters for her, wishing her good luck. She had come down early, knowing there might be a good many messages, and wanting to go through them all before she was called for her first entrance. Would Peter know of her engagement in this piece? Most probably he would, for he saw the English papers in Biarritz. Would he send her a message?

His was the name she searched for amongst the pile of telegrams and letters. Yes, it was here!

" Shall be thinking of you to-night, and wishing you a grand success.—LARRIALDE."

The telegram was sent from Switzerland. The ache in her heart knew a moment's ease. He was thinking of her! She folded up the message, and slipped it down inside her dress. That was what a sentimental schoolgirl would do. She knew that it was foolish, but having it there, over her heart—his message—seemed to bring him nearer to her.

" Curtain's up, Miss Ware." The call-boy was at the door.

Five minutes she had yet before her entrance. But she'd go down on to the stage and wait in the wings. Nothing to fear from the crowded house. Nothing to fear, now that she had Pierre's message.

On her entrance she received an ovation. Rather

unnerving that! But at least it gave her some seconds in which to pull herself together, and assured her too that the audience wished her well. They knew nothing of her as an actress, but they knew a good deal of her as a girl who had been unjustly suspected, and tried for a crime of which she was innocent.

At the end of the evening Hilary realised that the play had not failed, and that she too, hadn't done so badly. Naturally this sympathetic audience was bound to make the best of her performance; but Keswick was pleased, and the critics next day seemed pleased also. They did not hail her as a coming star, but they wrote of her as showing considerable promise, and as having played the part with sincerity and charm.

There was a 'call' next morning on the stage for a few small cuts and alterations, but as soon as she was free, Hilary walked along to Lincoln's Inn. At Trenchard's office she was told that Mr. Trenchard was engaged for a few minutes, but would be pleased to see her if she would wait.

"Congratulations!" said Trenchard, when at last she was shown into his room. "My wife and I were at the theatre last night. What does it feel like to be a London star?"

"I'm not one," said Hilary, smiling. "It was just luck that I got that engagement. I might have had a poor part, and then no one would have noticed me. The part makes the actress, you know."

"I don't imagine you'd find many theatrical folk to agree with you."

"It's true though," said Hilary.

They chatted over the play for a few minutes, and then Hilary came to the real object of her visit.

"I had a telegram from . . . from Peter, wishing me luck," she said, "and I'd like you to do something for me. I'd like you to tell me how much defending me in that trial cost him."

"What do you want to know that for?"

"Now that I'm working—and I think we're in for a fairly long run—I want to try and pay back some of that money."

Trenchard leant across and patted her hand as it lay on the table. "My dear child, don't you worry your head over that. He wouldn't wish it. He felt he owed you a debt of gratitude. You were good to him when he was ill."

Oh, why would people always insist so on Peter's gratitude, thought Hilary, a trifle wildly. "But I want to do it," she objected obstinately.

"Well, when your play has been running six months, you can come to me again and talk about it. Save your money, certainly. The stage is much too precarious a profession, I imagine, for extravagance. But don't save it with that end in view—repaying Peter."

"His telegram came from Switzerland."

"Yes, he's being sensible at last. Doing his best to get fit."

"Is he having treatment?"

"Well, he's in the hands of a very big specialist there."

"He's not worse, is he?"

"No, better I think. He got a bit knocked up in London, I fancy."

"That was my fault."

"No, it wasn't. He'd have done the same for anyone to whom he felt he was under some obligation—for whom, in a way, he was responsible."

"Then I wish he'd never—never felt like that," flashed Hilary. "If it made him worse. And it was such a little thing I did."

"Apparently he thought otherwise."

When she left the office in Lincoln's Inn, the ache in Hilary's heart had returned. Gratitude! A sense of duty towards her! Nothing more. But at least she knew that he was better—that comforted her; and she had his address. She would write to him.

It was a fortnight later that she received a reply to her letter.

"DEAR LITTLE GIRL," wrote Pierre, "I was delighted to hear of your success. I saw most of the notices in the London papers. So you're quite a famous actress now. Did you turn down the rich lord? I haven't seen any announcement of any grand marriage. Don't forget to let me know when you do decide to take one of the numerous suitors. I'll send you something better than a Swiss cuckoo clock. Do you remember the sound of the cuckoo the day we picnicked in the forest? I expect you're much too gay nowadays to remember our simple life at Arvray. When we meet again you won't recognise me. A fat and robust old gentleman I shall develop into if I go on at this rate. Write to me again when you can spare a moment. I've no news to tell you. My life is very dull at present. Not even baccarat to console me. Remember me to Nan. I see her play is a big success. Lots of good luck to you, yourself. Yours,

"PETER."

There wasn't much in this to ease the pain of loneliness in Hilary's heart Only the reference to that day they'd spent together in the forest. Over and over again, she repeated those lines, trying to read into them some unspoken thought—to discover just what he had been thinking of when he wrote them.

Keswick's play was still playing to good business; but though it had a certain following amongst those interested in the artistic, and more serious side of the theatre, it was not an outstanding commercial success. It might run for five or six months—no more.

Hilary had secured one or two contracts for films—not star parts, but quite well paid—and still she lived in a very quiet, and unextravagant fashion, with Nan at the little flat. Nan chaffed her sometimes. Teased her about developing into a highbrow. Taking lessons in

French, and so on; told her she was a miser; wanted to know what she was saving all her money for.

" Not that you aren't wise," said Nan. " The stage is an awful toss-up. Bill and I are going to chuck it as soon as we can get a little cash together. Bill's been offered something in South Africa. Quite a good job."

Bill was on tour in the provinces: perhaps coming to London in the spring.

Nan had been disappointed over the result of Hilary's 'publicity.' It hadn't been as useful as she thought. Still, getting the part in Keswick's play was lucky. Hilary would be sure to get other parts offered to her when that engagement ended.

One night soon after Christmas, the stage door-keeper knocked at Hilary's door. " A gentleman to see you, miss. Didn't give his name. Said he knew you in Biarritz."

Hilary's heart missed a beat. " Ask him to come up," she said.

Peter at last!

The stage door-keeper returned. He halted at the entrance to Hilary's dressing-room. " This way, sir."

Hilary was standing, waiting. Her heart was fluttering like a bird.

" It's Mr. Birkett, miss," said the stage door-keeper.

Roger entered. The disappointment was almost anguish, but still Hilary contrived to smile.

" Roger! How nice of you to come and see me! Sit down. I've got more than ten minutes' wait, before I go on again."

Roger was looking rather awkward and sheepish. Hilary put him at his ease. It appeared that Roger had seen the play on the previous evening. He thought he'd like to come round and congratulate her on her performance.

" But what are you doing in London? " asked Hilary.

" I've got a job with Eldridge the coloured poster man.

There's far more money in commercial art than in anything else. And after all it *is* art." Roger seemed almost as though he were defending himself.

"Of course it is," said Hilary warmly. "Those lovely posters of sunshiny places looming out of a London fog, give one a little comforting, happy glow. I'm glad you're doing that."

Roger seemed relieved. He was relieved, too, at Hilary's friendly attitude.

"I never wrote to acknowledge that letter you sent me after the trial," said Roger, "I didn't quite know what to say."

"It didn't need any acknowledgment. I only wanted to thank you for giving evidence."

Roger hesitated a moment. "We're friends still, Hilary?"

"Of course we are. Our friendship was never broken. We had some jolly times together, didn't we?"

"Yes. And Hilary . . ." he paused again. "If it wouldn't bore you to come out with me sometimes, I'd be glad. But probably you've got lots of gay friends, here in London."

"No, I haven't. This company's an awfully nice one, and there are heaps of other people I like—but I don't go out very much. I'm too busy, and besides—somehow—I don't know—I'm a lot older than when I first knew you, Roger."

"So am I," said Roger, rather soberly.

"Miss Ware, please!" shouted the call-boy in the passage.

"I must go," said Hilary. "But let's meet again—soon. Just as . . . as friends, Roger."

"Yes—only as friends. I've got over—that other idea. But that needn't prevent our seeing each other occasionally, need it? London's a bit lonely for a stranger."

Poor old Roger! Suddenly Roger seemed to Hilary rather like a forlorn small boy. "You'll have to come

round to our little flat—Nan's and mine. Nan's an awfully good sort. You'll like her. Don't go losing your heart to her, though. She's got a perfectly good husband on tour in the provinces."

"Miss Ware, please!" shouted the call-boy again—rather fiercely this time.

"Goodness! I'll be 'off,'" said Hilary. "Good-bye. Come round to us next Sunday afternoon to tea. Toasted crumpets, and a pokey flat. Leave your address at the stage door, and I'll write."

She flew off down the corridor, towards the big swing door leading to the stage.

CHAPTER XIV

IN March the run of Keswick's play ended, and to Nan's disgust, Hilary had received no other offer for London. The seven days' wonder of the trial was over—practically forgotten now; and though Hilary had given a good performance in Keswick's play, there were lots of other clever young actresses in London. The supply was greater than the demand.

In the film world, however, Hilary was making some headway. The work interested her certainly, but not to the same extent as did stage work. The long waits at the studio; the constant going over and over of scenes; the interminable delays; she found very trying—too much time on her hands in which to think of other matters—her own personal affairs.

Roger was now a constant visitor at their little flat. He and Nan had struck up a great friendship. Hilary teased her about it—told her Bill would be getting jealous.

"Bill's got too much sense for that," said Nan. "He knows he's the only currant in the bun, as far as I'm concerned. Besides, it's quite all right. Roger's interested elsewhere. There's a girl in Liverpool. He met her after he came back from Biarritz."

"Really!" said Hilary politely. Comforting to feel that Roger's affections were so well, and satisfactorily transferred. John Harper, also, was no longer lamenting her absence. Joan had been so sweet to him. He'd only lately realised how much she meant in his life. She was

an old-fashioned, home-loving girl—the sort that suited a plodding old stick like himself. They had just become engaged. How nice that was! Everybody was so pleased.

Everybody? Hilary told herself she was a hateful little dog-in-the-manger. She didn't want John, and she didn't want Roger, and yet she couldn't help feeling more lonely and hurt than ever. Nothing in Hilary Ware apparently to rouse any deep and lasting affection in any man's heart. Never mind! Life shouldn't defeat her. She would go on, and she would keep smiling.

She was getting good money for her film work, but still Trenchard refused to listen to any talk of repayment.

"You can discuss it with Peter yourself some day," he said, smiling. "It's nothing to do with me."

"Is he still in Switzerland?"

"I believe so, but he talks of visiting Paris, shortly."

He hadn't answered Hilary's last letter. Just friendly little notes they were—the letters that had passed between them. Often Hilary longed to say something more than just to recount the mere trivial details of her present existence. Longed to tell him something of her thoughts—her inner life. But pride held her back. She couldn't let him know she loved him—that she was longing more than anything else in the world to see his dear face again, to hear his kindly, mocking voice.

May came and with May a good contract for a new picture.

She would not be concerned in the scenes 'shot' at the London studio; but would play the part of a French girl, in the first half of the picture, to be taken abroad. What did they mean by abroad? Biarritz. That was where they were going.

Hilary could hardly contain her joy at this announcement. Pierre should be back in Biarritz by now. Trenchard had told her so.

Hilary sent off a friendly little note to Peter, telling him of her plans, and expressing a hope that she would see

him while she was staying in Biarritz; she would be with the other members of the company at the 'Angleterre.'

For the first time for nearly a year, her heart was filled with the joy of living. Even obtuse, pretty Nan had begun to regard her suspiciously. On their last evening together, Nan's curiosity got the better of her discretion. "Why all this excitement over a visit to Biarritz?" she asked. "You're not really fond of Peter, are you?"

"Of course I'm fond of him. You are too, aren't you?"

"Yes, but not . . . well . . . Hilary, if he'd cared like that, he would have asked you to marry him long ago."

"How do you know he didn't?" retorted Hilary, desperately endeavouring to make her voice sound merely casual, and pert.

"Oh, of course, if that's it, and you never told me——" Nan's tone was distinctly huffy.

"Don't be an old donkey, Nan. I was only teasing you. Peter and I are just friends, that's all. I don't suppose I'll even see him. He's been in Paris lately. Probably he's there now. But it *is* exciting going to Biarritz again. The Basque country is so lovely in the spring. And there are the Marshalls. I'd love to see them once more."

She hadn't quite succeeded in convincing Nan, and she knew it; so she yawned rather ostentatiously, said she was frightfully tired, and must go to bed.

Yet her excitement persisted; and as the train carried the company south from Paris next day, it grew in intensity.

Mrs. Marshall and John were on the platform to meet her. John's first greeting to her was to announce the loss of his front teeth. "Two came out in one pop," he said, displaying his toothless gums. "And one fell right into my porridge."

"You must forgive these gruesome gummy details," said Alice, laughing. "Losing our teeth has been a very thrilling experience."

She was genuinely glad to see Hilary again. Exciting, too, to welcome a real ' movie ' actress. " What a pity that Peter isn't here," she said. " He got back last week —stayed a few days—and then went off again."

" Really! " Hilary's voice evinced a merely polite and perfunctory interest.

" Nothing in that old affair, after all," thought Mrs. Marshall.

Hilary collected her luggage, and they got into Alice's car and drove to the ' Angleterre.'

CHAPTER XV

THE week was over—a busy week—a week during which Hilary refused to allow herself to think of anything except her work.

Peter had received her letter, and had gone off without leaving even a message for her. That was the plain hard fact that had to be faced—to be realised. She must never write to him again. Must drive all thought of him from her mind. Lucky to have her work to do!

Crayshaw, the director, had spoken to her about a fresh contract—a very good one. She was not starring in this present picture, but under the new contract she would play lead. This was something to think about—to fix her mind upon. Her career. Well, lucky, lucky, lucky to have that! She couldn't have everything.

Two more days, and the company would be going back to London. Hilary would be glad now to get away from Biarritz; but this was Sunday, and they were taking the day off. A lovely day of bright, warm sunshine. How beautiful the country would look to-day! Suddenly Hilary knew that above everything else she longed to see the old Basque farmhouse once again—for the last time. She'd get a car—take a present out to Marie. With a little pang she remembered that last day—the empty bag she'd handed to the Frenchwoman as a parting gift, before she drove away to the prison at Bayonne.

She told the driver of her car to take her to Arvray; but as they passed the little rocky pool in front of the hotel, where lilies grew, and goldfish flashed in the sun,

Crayshaw rose from a deck-chair set on the grass, and hailed her. He had been sitting in the warm sunshine, reading the London papers.

"Hullo, Hilary! Where are you off to?"

"Just out for a drive."

"Want to take me?"

She didn't, but she couldn't say so. "I'd love to," she answered untruthfully, "but I'm going to friends."

"I see. Well, here's the contract we were talking about. They've sent it out to me. Of course you won't want to sign it until you get back to London, but you can have a look at it."

"Thanks." She took the paper which he held out to her, and drove off. When they had left the town behind them she told her chauffeur that it was Larrialde's house at Arvray she wished to visit. He nodded. He knew the house.

There was hay in the fields, and honeysuckle in the hedges. Over their heads, in the blue sky, the larks were singing. Now, they were in the lane with the walled orchard on their right; now, they had passed the entrance gates and were in the drive; and as the car swept up to the house she saw another car before it—Pierre's car, and Pierre himself mounting to the driver's seat.

He turned quickly, saw her, pulled off his beret, and came towards her. "The gods have been kind!" he called gaily. "I was coming in to Biarritz, in search of you."

"Rather late in the day," she retorted, laughing at him. It was easy to laugh, now that she was here beside him. In this fashion she could disguise her own absurd emotion. "You took good care to run away directly you received my letter saying I was coming to Biarritz."

"I've only got it now—this moment," he said. He held it out to her. It had been readdressed to Paris, and evidently sent back to Arvray again. "I motored from Bordeaux and stayed at Dax last night."

As he opened the door of her car, he spoke rapidly

to the driver in French. The man nodded, and when Hilary had got out, he turned and drove back towards the entrance gates.

"Now get into my car," said Peter. "I'll see you safely back to Biarritz later."

Obediently she took her seat beside him, and he swung his own car round, down the drive, and out along the lane.

"You're very high-handed," she remarked.

He smiled down at her. "A regular cave-man now," he answered. "I told you I'd develop into a very robust old gentleman."

"You're looking splendid."

"Of course I am. You don't think I stayed all those months in Switzerland for nothing, do you? But what's the matter with you? You don't look up to much."

Hilary laughed. "Thank you," she said. "You're very kind."

"Not at all. Too many parties?"

"No parties at all," she answered. "Real hard grind."

"Tell me about everything."

"There's nothing to tell. Yes, I've learnt French."

"Splendid! We can talk twice as much now, in two languages. What else?"

"Just work."

"You're going to make a name for yourself as a grand movie star, I suppose?"

"I don't know about that. I've got a contract here in my bag that's a very good one. I haven't signed it yet."

"Do you mean to?"

Hilary hesitated. "I haven't decided yet."

"Going to be married?"

"Not that I know of."

He looked at her searchingly for a moment, but her face was turned away. "Not found that hero of romance yet, then?" he teased her.

" No, not yet."

" What was the phrase you liked? ' Dear acquaintance,' wasn't it? "

She made no reply, but said suddenly: " Where are we going? "

" To the forest, to sit by the little brook again for half an hour. We had a talk there that I've often thought of since. I want to explain more fully my meaning—make my point of view more clear. Our conversation that day was—broken off—it should have lasted longer."

She tried to answer lightly. " You wanted to go to the Casino. How does the baccarat progress? Are you winning? "

" I haven't played since then. I told you that I wouldn't, until you said I might. Am I not good? "

" Very," she answered. He could have nothing really, to say to her—nothing of importance. His tone was only that of a good friend—a friend who teased and provoked. Peter Pan.

Through the lovely villages again they passed. Green spires of cypresses, grey stone churches, roses straggling, red, and pink, and sweet-scented, over the old walls.

At last they reached the forest, found the spot beside the stream, and again sat down. Were they the same tall foxgloves leaning over the murmuring water, the same soft-voiced cuckoos calling?

" Don't sit too near to me," said Pierre suddenly. " Your proximity is disturbing to the flow of logical ideas. And what I have to say must be stated clearly and definitely. I went to London to see you—to have this talk—you weren't there."

" We must have crossed each other."

" Never mind, we're here now—together."

He leant over and took her hand, and held it for a moment tightly in his own. Then he released it, and sat back. " No, that is apt to cloud the brain a little.

I want to talk. Do you remember in London once, I said I'd ask you to forgive me? "

"Yes."

"Well, it isn't exactly forgiveness I want—it's understanding—what I said about marriage—and our relationship. I'm not a rake—a dissipated philanderer."

"I never thought you were."

"Marriage to me is a man-made law—no more. I am not immoral because I say that under certain circumstances, a less binding contract might be better. The sacred part of any union between man and woman is its real and lasting affection. Marriage which is true mateship can be very wonderful and very beautiful."

"You said you didn't believe in love."

"You are not to interrupt. I said I wasn't sentimental. I'm not. People imagine that I take nothing seriously. That's where they're mistaken. I am a serious person, and marriage is a serious business. My only virtue—if it is a virtue—is a really sound, common sense. If I had asked you to marry me here, that day a year ago, you might have said 'yes.' Why? Because it would, perhaps, have solved your difficulties. You might have bound yourself to me just for that reason, and we might both have been unhappy ever after."

"You didn't love me."

"Who knows when love begins? I didn't realise I loved you then . . . but afterwards I did. When I saw you in the prison at Bayonne. That day I knew you were the only woman in the world I wanted for my wife. My heart was so full of an aching tenderness it was almost pain. Love came to me then, and it has never left me since."

"Why didn't you tell me . . . that night . . . after the trial? "

"You had gone through a terrible ordeal. You were grateful to me. I didn't want to be married out of gratitude, and to find afterwards your face turning from me—a poor invalid—a drag on your happiness,

your vitality, your youth. Find you regretting a lost career."

"Oh, Peter . . ." Hilary's voice was broken.

He took her hand again, holding it tight. "No, let me finish. I meant to give you your chance. All the offers of marriage that you had—the stage work. And I'd take my chance too. I'd get well. And if at the end of that time you were free, I'd ask you to give yourself to me. You'd be sure then, and so should I. Sure that we could take each other in marriage—for better, for worse, until death do us part."

"I was always sure. I . . ."

"Listen. I'm rich—that's nothing. You can be rich too, and still keep your freedom. Your work's going to bring you in more money than you want. But if you marry me, I don't want to share you with the pictures. I'd ask you to give that up—that contract——"

She pulled her hand free, opened her bag, took out the contract, and tore it into fragments.

"I wouldn't care if you were just a peasant working in the fields," she said fiercely. "I'd give up all the finest contracts in the world to work beside you, as long as I could share your home—your heart—be with you always."

He took her in his arms and held her close. "Say that you love me then." For the first time she heard his voice husky and uneven—shaken with passion.

"I love you more than I love life. I'd die for you."

"Live for me. That's more important."

He kissed her lips, her hair, her eyes. "You crept into a little corner of my heart," he whispered. "I couldn't drive you out."

"Did you try?"

He laughed down into her eyes. "Not very hard. I found I didn't want to drive you out. You were part of myself—my 'dear acquaintance.'"

The brook rippled on, and far away the cuckoo called.

. . . . . .

John Marshall came out from the house to help his

mother in the garden. "If there's another wedding can I be a bridesmaid?" he inquired.

"Little boys aren't bridesmaids."

"What are they then?"

"Pages, sometimes."

"Oh." John looked solemn.

"What's put weddings into your head?" asked Alice.

John took no notice of her question. "Can I be a page, then?"

Alice regarded her little son smilingly. A toothless page struck her as being highly undecorative. "Well, you know . . . your teeth . . ."

"Oh," said John anxiously, thrusting his pink tongue through the gaps, "*must* pages have them?"

Alice laughed. "Well, they're not absolutely essential, but they're desirable. What's started you off on the subject of weddings?"

"Peter's going to have one," said John.

"What!" Alice's voice was shrill with surprise.

John nodded. "Yes. Jean told Jacques that Peter was talking to the Maire about it. Will you ask Peter if I can be a page?"

But John would never be a page at Peter's wedding, for Peter and Hilary had been married that morning at Arvray, and now, in the car, were speeding along past the Spanish frontier, mounting the sunny slopes of the Pyrenees towards the Pas de Roland, where Charlemagne and his Paladins fought the great battle of Roncevalles twelve centuries ago.

Amongst the beech woods, all clad in the first bright green of spring, they halted.

"Now for our wedding breakfast," said Peter. "We'll drink the health of the bride and bridegroom. And make all the speeches ourselves."

"I'll make my speech in French," said Hilary.

But it wasn't in French she made her speech. Love needs no words.

Later, as Peter lay on the soft red carpet of fallen leaves,

his head in her lap, she told him of her suffering the night he'd said good-bye.

"And do you think you were the only one?" he answered. "Perhaps I was a fool. I wanted then, more than anything else in the world, to take you in my arms—to tell you how I loved you. We've wasted a year. But I thought that I was right."

"You were right," she answered loyally. "What does the past matter, now that we have each other? Peter . . ." She hesitated. "Do you know where I'd like to go . . . some day?"

"You shall go where you please—as long as we go together. Pamplona to-night. Madrid—back through France to Italy—Naples, and then . . . Australia?"

She bent her head and kissed him.

THE END

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